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CITY COUSINS.

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY

MRS. W. J. HAYS,

AUTHOR OF "PRINCE LAZYBONES," "A DOMESTIC HEROINE,"
"A LOVING SISTER," "CASTLE COMFORT," ETC.

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CITY COUSINS.



CHAPTER I.

THE COLD SHOULDER.

“**H**AS she come yet?” “Have you seen her?” “Is she nice?” were the hurried questions of a group of children on the hot sands of Burton Beach. They had but recently arrived from the city, and their cheeks had not yet been tanned by sea and sun. Isabella and Vincent Travers were the tallest of the four, and it was they who were speaking to the matronly woman in cap and kerchief who had just joined them.

“Yes, I have seen her, Miss Belle; and why shouldn’t she be nice, Master Vinnie, when she’s your own cousin?” responded the

person addressed, evidently thinking this an appeal to the boy's self-respect.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Vincent, kicking up the sand and pebbles; "but Belle says she's sure to be gawky,—country cousins always are."

"I don't believe she's got such pretty dresses as we have," said Tillie.

"Nor half such nice pails and shovels," said wee, toddling Clara.

At this they all laughed.

"If she were only a boy!" said Vincent.

"Or knew how to dance, and to swim, and play tennis!" said Belle.

Just then a slim, pretty lady, leading a little girl by the hand, came towards them.

"Here Belle and Tillie and Vincent, let me introduce you to Amy; and Clara, too, must not be left out. Amy, these are your cousins: I hope you will all have pleasant times together. Good-by." So saying, the lady, a young aunt, joined a gay party of pleasure-seekers, and went off.

The girl looked about her wistfully. She was not more than twelve years old, and

rather small, with keen, delicate features, and bright dark eyes. She was dressed very plainly in a gingham gown. The other children returned her gaze with the cool insolence of indifference, and want of courtesy. Belle and Vincent could have charming manners when they chose, as at the dance of the night before; but now they simply stared, and made no movement to indicate a welcome.

“For shame!” muttered the nurse; whereupon Vincent turned on his heel, and joined some other boys and girls, while Isabella took up a book, and sat down to read; little Clara alone putting up her chubby cheeks to be kissed. In vain the nurse remonstrated. Tillie followed her sister’s evil example, and went unconcernedly about her tunnel-boring. They were all pretty children, and no one would have supposed that any but the gentlest motives controlled them. Isabella knew that Amy had not received so many advantages as herself, and was weakly afraid that she might commit some breach of decorum before her fashionable watering-place

acquaintances; so, without any consideration of her unkindness, she was silly enough to ignore her.

Amy looked with surprise from one cousin to the other, and then, as if arranging the matter in her mind, drew near to Clara and nurse, who gladly spoke to her of her journey, her home, and her amusements. As her low, clear voice reached Belle, it struck her as a very sweet one; but she went on reading in sullen silence, feeling sure that "the little rustic," as she called her, would surely disgrace her in their evening games.

Tillie, too, made no effort of friendliness, but, tired of her play in the sand, persuaded Clara to follow her to some distant rocks.

A boat was tossing idly near, and into this the two children climbed.

"Let's play we are out in a storm, and in great danger," cried Tillie, rocking the boat violently.

Nurse was not looking, but Amy was, and saw tiny Clara reach far over the boat's side, lose her balance, and fall in. Quickly a great wave bore her from the shore. Be-

fore frightened Tillie could shriek for help, Amy had run with the fleetness of a fawn, and, wading out, had caught Clara in her arms. There really had been no great danger, for there were plenty of people about, as well as boats and ropes; but Amy's presence of mind filled the by-standers with admiration.

“Whose child is that? What a brave and quick action!” were the expressions Belle heard as the two wet children were led away by the terrified and reproving nurse.

Perhaps she and Vincent were both sorry that they had not met Amy in a more friendly fashion: but as yet, neither of them was prepared to acknowledge it; for when evening came, and all the gay butterflies were swarming in the hotel parlors, they made no advance towards the little white-robed Amy, whose simplicity they did not admire. Set after set of quadrilles were danced, Belle and Vincent leading, — Belle in satin and lace, quite like a queen, and Vincent attired in the velvet of a young courtier; but Amy remained in her corner with Tillie, who

alone tried to make some reparation for the rudeness of the morning. The young aunt — Miss Gaylord, in whose care the children had been left while their mother was visiting, thought that, so long as her little charges were well dressed and well fed, they needed nothing more — danced away to her heart's content with the rest of the butterflies. "Nurse is *so* capable," she said, "that she really leaves me nothing to do."

There was one person impressed differently, — one who had seen the morning's performance, had witnessed the brave act of Amy, and was watching the child in the evening. Something very winning this person found in the keen, delicate features and bright dark eyes of little Amy, — something that touched her heart, and made her own childhood come back again. This person was on the lookout for some actors for tableaux which were to be given for the benefit of a hospital; and, making this the excuse for an introduction, she sought Miss Gaylord.

"Surely, you don't want that little mouse of an Amy!" was Miss Gaylord's exclamation.

tion as she bowed with graceful surprise to Mrs. Emmet, the dignified and accomplished lady whose wealth and refinement made her conspicuous at Burton Beach. "I think you must mean Belle, my niece: she is a much prettier child."

"No, Miss Gaylord," responded Mrs. Emmet, "the child for my purpose is just that 'little mouse, Amy': she has qualities both of mind and person, if I am not mistaken, which suit the character of my tableau."

"Oh, well, I suppose you must know!" said Miss Gaylord, with a little shrug of her pretty shoulders; "but I really don't see any thing picturesque about Amy. However, though she's a cousin to the children, being a Travers, she's no relation of mine; and I suppose that may be the reason why I admire Belle more: every one thinks their own crow the blackest;" and Miss Gaylord gave Mrs. Emmet a smile and a courtesy, and glided off for another waltz as soon as she had led Amy up to her new acquaintance. A pleasant chat followed, and Mrs. Emmet was quite satisfied with her choice; for she found

Amy, though modest, by no means timid, and there was soon a frank friendship started between them. A little while after, there was a general retirement of children from the parlors; and Amy bade Mrs. Emmet good-night, with the assurance of meeting her again in the morning.

"Did she really ask you to act in tableaux?" said Tillie, who, with nurse and Belle, was mounting the broad staircase which led to their rooms.

"Yes, she really did," answered Amy. "Was it very strange?"

"No, but it's very nice. Belle never has been asked, neither has Vincent."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Amy: "do you think they'll care? for, if they do, I'd much rather either of them would take my place."

"Thank you!" said Belle very stiffly. "I don't put myself forward that way."

"What way?" asked Amy.

Belle made no reply, more for want of a good reason than from bad manners; as, in spite of her envy and general dissatisfaction, she was not wholly displeased; at least,

Amy had not disgraced her. Amy, however, could not fathom Belle's mind. She felt that she caused her displeasure; but why, she could not understand. She had not the least idea of her cousin's evil pride; and, when they parted for the night, she offered to kiss her as kindly as she did Tillie and little Clara.

All that nurse said on the subject was, "It's a great shame for you to act so ugly, Miss Belle; and, when your ma comes home, I guess there'll be a change. You might have kissed the little thing, whether you wanted to or not."

"I am not a hypocrite," answered Belle, with a toss of her head; "and I'm not going to make believe I like Amy. I did not want her to be with us this summer, and I don't know why papa should have forced us to have her. Her father isn't a bit like papa: he is just a stupid old country farmer."

Nurse said, "Hush! she'll hear you," shaking her forefinger at Belle as she unbuttoned Tillie's waist; but she was not a wise woman, and her advice seldom had any

effect. If she had told Belle that she ought to go on her knees, and pray that the pride and vanity of her heart might be rooted out, it would have been what the child really needed ; but she was not equal to the opportunity, and there was no one else to do so good and timely a service.

The thin partition between the rooms did not prevent Amy's quick ear from hearing much that was said ; and this, added to the refused kiss, became more than she could bear. The excitement of the day had brought on headache ; and, long after every one was asleep, the child lay sobbing, with only her misery for company.





CHAPTER II.

A NEW FRIEND.

THE night was a very warm one ; and Mrs. Emmet was so restless that at last she arose from her bed, put on a light wrapper and shawl, and went out on the upper piazza. All the bedrooms of this story opened upon the same corridor ; and as she paced softly up and down, watching the heaving billows in the moonlight, she thought she heard a sound which did not come from the sea. Pausing a moment before the latticed door which led to the rooms occupied by the Travers party, she now was able to distinguish the sobbing of a child. Knowing that Miss Gaylord's apartment was farther off, and knowing also, by experience, that nurses are apt to sleep heavily, and her heart being

moved with compassion, she pushed gently against the door, and found it yielded to her touch. The moonlight made her able to see two small beds, in one of which lay chubby little Clara Travers, soundly sleeping, and in the other Amy, with dishevelled hair and rumpled pillows, moaning and crying as if her little heart would break.

"My dear, what *is* the matter?" asked Mrs. Emmet, putting her hand gently on the crying child.

Amy's sobs ceased suddenly, and looking up with alarm, she said, "Oh! I didn't know any one heard me. Oh! oh! oh!—I am so sorry!"

"Hush, dearie, and tell me what ails you. Are you in pain?" said Mrs. Emmet.

"Yes, — a little; my head aches," answered Amy.

"I should think it might, it is so warm. Try now to stop crying, while I go and get some cologne to bathe your head. I will be back in a moment."

The few words of sympathy had already calmed the child; and she was lying quite

still when Mrs. Emmet returned, and sat down beside her, drawing the hair gently away from her brow, and with deft touch applying the cooling lotion.

"Mrs. Emmet," said Amy, after a while, "won't you please not have me in your tableau?"

"Why do you ask, dear? I thought you were quite pleased."

"Yes, — I was," faltered Amy; "but I think now that perhaps Belle would like me better for not doing it."

"And what difference does it make to Belle?"

"I don't know: but she doesn't like me, and wishes I was not here, and says my father is — is" — but here the sobs swelled up again in her throat, and she could say no more.

"Ah! I see," said Mrs. Emmet. "Belle is jealous. But how do you know she doesn't like you?"

"Oh! I can tell very easily: she wouldn't kiss me for good-night, and she said such unkind things!"

“To you?”

“No, not *to* me; but I could not help hearing what she said.”

“You should not have listened, dear.”

“But I could not help it, Mrs. Emmet. And oh! I would not have minded half so much if she had not spoken so scornfully of my dear father.”

“That was, indeed, very wrong; but little girls sometimes say foolish things which they are sorry for. If I were you, I would not let Belle’s behavior affect me.”

“I tried not to, Mrs. Emmet. I thought it might be only her way, and that it was because I did not know her very well; but now I do want to go home: I don’t want to stay here at all,” and again the sobs broke out.

“Are you obliged to stay? can you tell me the cause of your coming?” asked Mrs. Emmet.

“Uncle Vincent, Belle’s father, wrote to my father for me to join his children at the seashore; that is all I know about it, except that father had to come to the city just the

day after Miss Gaylord left it, and so he did not see her till he got to the station here, and had no time to buy me any new things as mother wished, and he went back by the next train; but I do so wish he had waited, for I don't want to stay."

Mrs. Emmet listened patiently to the broken words and sobs; then, taking Amy's hands in her own, she said, "I am too much of a stranger, dear child, to have any right to advise you, but I also have no right to deny my sympathy. Try to be patient and brave, and I am certain you will be rewarded. By to-morrow's light, every thing will look differently: Belle may have gotten over her ill-humor; and you may be sure, that, if you show no resentment, she will soon be ashamed of herself. Little people, I find, have their trials as well as big people; and we are all told to follow the example of One who returned good for evil. Let me smooth your pillows now, and try to make you more comfortable: there, isn't that much nicer? Now listen to the waves,—they always have a story to tell; and, while you

listen, I will stroke your hair till you fall asleep."

And so little Amy was comforted.

It was long that night before Mrs. Emmet herself slept. She paced the moon-lighted corridor again, pausing every little while to make sure that her young friend was silent, and then resuming her own deeper and graver reflections.

At the breakfast-table the following morning, she bowed in her graceful way to Miss Gaylord, and said, —

"I have postponed my tableaux, Miss Gaylord, having come to the conclusion, that, in so public a place, it is not well to bring children so prominently forward. I have always had some doubts as to its expediency, and I have now become convinced of its impropriety."

"But, my dear Mrs. Emmet, that is not the way to make money," answered Miss Gaylord, with a little shrug of her shoulders. "I thought you were so interested in St. Mary's Hospital."

"So I am, and in young children as well:

that which excites envy and jealousy among them should not be encouraged, even for so good a cause as St. Mary's Hospital; but I intend only postponing our festivity. I shall have something of the sort next winter at my own house, where there will be less publicity; and then I hope to have the pleasure of seeing all your little people."

"Perhaps that *will* be better," responded Miss Gaylord, not unmindful of Mrs. Emmet's beautiful house, which she had often wished to see, and really quite ignorant of all that had transpired. "Besides," she added, "our little mouse, Amy, to whom you took a fancy, is not at all well, nurse tells me. I have not seen the child, but nurse says she is feverish and dull: children are *such* a responsibility. I suppose I shall have to send for a doctor. But there goes my tennis party, so I cannot talk any more. Good-morning;" and, with one of her little courtesies, Miss Gaylord glided off.



CHAPTER III.

AMY'S ILLNESS.

DOES any child know what it is to be ill in a great caravansary of a seaside hotel, where every one is gathered for amusement, and no one wants to even know that there is such a thing as illness? Where doors are opening and shutting, banging to and fro, and footsteps are falling, and people are shouting to one another, and porters are trundling their barrows, and tumbling off trunks? Where quiet hardly reigns at midnight, and all the little home comforts are difficult to obtain?

It seemed to Amy very hard to be ill under such circumstances: but when nurse felt her hot head and hands, she forbade her rising; and by and by Amy had no wish to

rise ; but oh, how she did wish she could be still !

And then came a stranger to look at her, and feel her pulse, and make her put out her tongue. He may have been very kind, and very wise ; but he wasn't the least like dear old Dr. Bolus, in whose gig behind "old Whitey" she had had many a pleasant ride, stopping at farmhouses, and getting posies from the gardens, and buttermilk from the churns.

To add to her wretchedness, she heard some flibbertigibbet say, "I hope that child hasn't any thing contagious."

Suppose she had, and suppose all her cousins should take the disease. Dreadful thought ! Isabella and Vincent would then have good cause indeed to regret her coming among them.

But Isabella and Vincent were not troubling themselves about her. They were off in a yacht with a merry party, and Miss Gaylord had taken Tillie and Clara to drive, and nurse had darkened the room, and told Amy to go to sleep, and she had tried to do

so; but the long weary hours seemed interminable. Mrs. Emmet had inquired after her, and sent her a lovely little bunch of grasses; but she had heard nurse tell her that the doctor said she must have no visitors, and must be kept very quiet. And then there had been a prolonged whispering which she could not understand; and nurse would not give her any explanation of it, only re-iterating the doctor's commands, and bidding her "be a good girl."

Nurse was not unkind; but oh! how different it all was from home, where mother and aunt Kitty would have taken care of her, and Pedro would have come to her bedside to be patted, and wag his sympathetic tail, and look with loving eyes as if he would give worlds to make her well.

And then when sleep came, it brought a repetition of all these thoughts and recollections, and jumbled them up with an effort to get home from some very confused and distressing place. The hours and days became so mixed that Amy did not know one from the other, and then there came a change.

It was morning, and Amy had been taken from bed, and put in a large chair by the window, where she could see people walking on the beach, and watch the waves come rolling in. Nurse and the children were on the sands, and Miss Gaylord was with Amy. Miss Gaylord was very pretty to look at, Amy thought: she had such a sheer, white muslin dress with innumerable ruffles, and on her fingers were sparkling rings, and her soft, wavy hair was arranged so gracefully. But Amy was just a little afraid to talk to her: she had a sort of far-away look, as if her thoughts were not on the present moment; and she was working diligently at her embroidery, as if it were very important, and she did not wish to be disturbed. Nurse had arranged every thing for Amy — all the glasses and spoons, and a plate of toast — before going out. But Amy wanted to know if a letter had come for her, — she thought she had heard one spoken of, — and yet she did not like to bother Miss Gaylord; when suddenly Mrs. Emmet's face appeared, and, with a pleasant “May I come in?” she

entered. Miss Gaylord was delighted to see her, and put down her work at once, saying, —

“This is a new *rôle* for me, I assure you, — staying in-doors such a fine morning; but nurse said she must go out, so here I am: and this little mouse hasn’t spoken a word since I sat down. Do you think she ever speaks, Mrs. Emmet? I never saw so silent a child.”

“Indeed!” said Mrs. Emmet. “I am sure she will speak to me, when I tell you that I want to borrow her, — won’t you, Amy?”

“I don’t know,” said Amy, smiling.

“Oh, you little mute!” cried Miss Gaylord, shaking her finger at her: “you have found your tongue at last. But what do you suppose Mrs. Emmet means by borrowing you?”

“I don’t know,” again said Amy.

“Nor I,” said Miss Gaylord.

“Well, I must explain,” said Mrs. Emmet. “I am going in a few days to the Delaware Water-Gap, and I want a pleasant little companion. Will you lend me Amy,

Miss Gaylord? and will you go with me, Amy?"

"I have nothing to say about it," said Miss Gaylord: "I am only an *aide de camp*. You will have to appeal to headquarters, Mrs. Emmet. To tell the truth, I should be glad to have less responsibility, and would have sent this little mouse home when she was first taken sick, but that nurse begged me not to, and the doctor said she would be all right in a few days; and they wouldn't even let me send word to her parents. Oh! I assure you, I have had a great deal of trouble on Amy's account."

Mrs. Emmet could not recall a single evening in which Miss Gaylord had been absent from the dances and games; but she said nothing about that, and, turning to Amy, repeated her request, adding, —

"I have an excellent maid, — a colored woman, who has so little to do that she will be glad to have some one to wait upon; and we will go part of the way in my carriage: for I like driving better than railway travelling in warm weather."

"But, Mrs. Emmet," said Miss Gaylord, "wouldn't a well child be a livelier companion? Now, there's Belle: to be sure, she's torn all her frocks, and danced her silk stockings to shreds; but she'd be less trouble than Amy."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Emmet suavely. "I could find plenty of substitutes, doubtless; but Amy is my choice, and will be no trouble."

"Oh! *chacun à son goût*," responded Miss Gaylord. "What do you say, Amy?"

Now, the one wish of Amy's homesick little heart was to go home; but when she saw Mrs. Emmet's kind eyes bent upon her, and felt the warm pressure of her caressing hand, and thought how differently she was regarded by Miss Gaylord as well as her cousins, she said, —

"If Mrs. Emmet is so kind as to really want me, I will go with pleasure, if my father and mother consent."

"Oh, there's little doubt of that!" said Miss Gaylord lightly, taking a letter from her pocket. "There, read that, while I ar-

range details with Mrs. Emmet; for of course you will have to be made presentable. Some of Belle's frocks may fit you: she has lots of old ones she has outgrown, I believe." But Amy waited to hear no more, having seized her father's letter, and kissed it rapturously.

"Little actress!" said Miss Gaylord, with a shrug of her shoulders and a scornful little smile. But these words were lost on Amy, though not on Mrs. Emmet, who gravely replied, —

"I do not agree with you: art but imitates Nature; and as for the dress question, Miss Gaylord, pray give it no thought. Amy's simple little gowns suit me better than the most elegant costumes. I like children to be children, — neat, clean, and wholesome; not fantastic little fashion-plates, ruffled and puffed, and beaded and braided, until they think of nothing but their clothes. Look at Amy, now, in her little plain flannel gown, and see how sweet she looks; but I want her to look strong and healthy, and I do not believe Burton Beach agrees with her: so, if you please, have her ready by

Saturday, and we will remove all responsibility from your shoulders. I have taken a wonderful fancy to that child."

"So it seems, and an inexplicable one to me," answered Miss Gaylord, bowing out her visitor.





CHAPTER IV.

A JOURNEY.

BELLE received the news of Amy's going as she had done her coming, — with cool indifference, and made no effort in the few intervening days to show any cousinly regard. But Clara and Tillie, who were now allowed to be in her room, were very friendly and pleasant. Amy was always ready to dress their dolls, or write their funny little letters. It pleased her to hear them prattle, and she had a stock of fairy tales which they delighted to have her repeat; and for a while it seemed to her that she might have remained with them, and been very happy, notwithstanding Vincent and Belle.

But the day came for her departure; and when she heard Miss Gaylord say; "*What a*

relief it is not to have the care of that delicate child," she could not be too thankful for Mrs. Emmet's kindness. She had yet a little cough, and a pain in her chest; but she could walk without feeling so very tired: and she laughed at the many pillows which Di, Mrs. Emmet's maid, insisted upon tucking behind her in the stage which carried them to the train. Miss Gaylord kissed her "good-by," and Tillie and Clara waved their handkerchiefs; but Belle and Vincent were nowhere to be seen: they had gone to the beach early on purpose to be away when she left. Amy could not help being pained at this: she could not understand it, as no one can, who lives in an atmosphere of love; but every unpleasantness was forgotten in the novelty and variety of the journey. They were riding on the Delaware and Lackawanna Railway, and found the scenery very picturesque: but, after two hours had gone, they stopped at one of the "junctions," and exchanged their seats in a parlor car for a delightful, wide, old-fashioned carriage which was waiting at the station, and the driver of which was Di's

husband. Here, too, was Mrs. Emmet, who had preceded them. Her somewhat grave face lighted up as Jack lifted Amy to the seat beside her; and she took Amy's face in both hands, and kissed her. Mrs. Emmet had no children, but she told Amy about ever so many nephews and nieces. It seemed to Amy as if she must be in a dream, and a very pleasant one; for here she was with a comparative stranger, miles and miles away from home; and yet every thing was so arranged for her comfort, and done for her particular benefit, that not even her mother or aunt Kitty could have been more considerate.

Mrs. Emmet wore a soft, gray Indian silk, with a bonnet of the same, on which were scarlet peppies, and a travelling-cloak of some kind of light cloth, which was fastened with silver clasps. All her things were rich and elegant, from the beautiful Russia-leather dressing-case to the dainty lunch-basket with its choice contents; but Amy did not feel oppressed by the elegance, even when she compared it with the simplicity of

her own home; for Mrs. Emmet's manner was just as simple and natural as her aunt Kitty's or her mother's.

If she had been a little older, she might have remembered that truth and purity and simplicity are the same everywhere, and that only the vulgar make their riches a cause for ostentation and pride.

Beside the lunch-basket, which was opened soon, stood a cage, in which was a yellow, long-necked canary, looking as much at home as if he travelled every day, and every once in a while giving a little twitter as his share of the conversation; for, as Di was on the front seat with Jack, Mrs. Emmet and Amy talked unrestrainedly. Miss Gaylord would have had no ground for calling Amy mute could she have heard her now, at her ease, and with an interested listener, chatting about her father and mother, her dear old home that had been her mother's and grandmother's birthplace; her garden full of roses and pinks and lilies; the cow, the horse, the chickens, and the barn; the village church, and the beautiful lake, on the

clear waters of which she could row her own little boat, and which in winter was frozen so solid that she skated on it. No, there was danger of her talking too much; and Mrs. Emmet coaxed her to put her head on her shoulder, and try to get a little nap.

The country they were passing through was covered with pleasant and fruitful farms, and once in a while they would stop at a clear spring, to water the horses, or rest in the shadow of a branching elm; or, meeting hay-makers, Jack would have a chat as to the best roads, and where they had better stop for the night.

In this way the day passed most delightfully; for the air was sweet with perfume, and just breezy enough to keep the heat from being too great. As they neared the village, where they were to remain till the next day, Mrs. Emmet said, —

“Don’t you think this pleasanter than being on the crowded piazzas at Burton Beach, Amy?”

“Oh, yes! Mrs. Emmet, ever so much,”

replied Amy. "I felt so lonely there; but that was because I knew nobody, I suppose."

"Not entirely. I knew a great many: but it was distracting, and one's thoughts were constantly turned to what people said and did; while here the silence and peace and the evening calm suggest something much better. Look! does that not seem as if the portals of peace were opening, and light from the far-off land of happiness were streaming down?"

Amy looked to where her friend pointed, and saw the setting sun tinting snowy clouds with rose and violet; while bars of gold parted the bands of color. Below, in the valley, was the soft gloom of twilight. Mrs. Emmet's face changed in expression; and Amy watched it as she did the evening sky, for it was all aglow with feeling.

At last, with a sigh, Mrs. Emmet said, —

"Oh, if we could see beyond the clouds!" and then, turning to put an extra shawl about her little companion, she began quoting some pretty verses.

"There now, Amy," she said, "that is as

near as I can come to being a poet ; but if ever you write rhymes, don't forget to send me a copy."

"What makes you think such a funny thing, Mrs. Emmet? I just hate compositions."

"Do you? Why, I thought you looked quite poetical; perhaps it was valentinical, after all."

Amy shook her head. "No," she said, "valentines are worse still."

"With their hearts and darts, and loves and doves? Oh! I love them dearly; but we must descend from our high talk, for here is the 'Wayside Inn' and supper,—not just tea, but a good, substantial supper. Di is getting ready to unpack.—Here, Di, is the bird-cage and the basket. I will take Amy."

"Oh, please, Mrs. Emmet, do tell me what Di's real name is! Is it Dinah, or Diana?" asked Amy, in a low tone.

Mrs. Emmet laughed. "It is neither: it is Diademina. Isn't that a royal name?"

Amy laughed heartily, as she said,—

“Where did she get it? Did she pick it up?”

“No, indeed: her mother was a very romantic darkey, and coined it to suit herself, —so Di has told me. But Di is nearly as old as I am.”

Amy looked so puzzled, that Mrs. Emmet said, —

“Oh! fine feathers make fine birds. Put me in Di’s alpaca gown and poke bonnet, and I would look as old as she does: but here we are. Come, Amy.”





CHAPTER V.

A NEW PET.

THE carriage had stopped before a long, low, wooden portico, at the door of which stood a ruddy, short man, who led them into a musty little parlor, where yellow-and-red sunsets, and grass-green mountains, framed in gilt, were hung on the walls. Out of the parlor opened a dining-room, with uncarpeted floor and unattractive aspect. Mrs. Emmet shook her head doubtfully.

“This is not as agreeable as it might be; however, we must make the best of it. Let us take a look above stairs.” So saying, she mounted to the second story, which commanded a fine prospect, and the rooms of which were fairly comfortable, opening, as they did, on a vine-covered piazza.

“Now I shall astonish our friends a little, for I am going to have our supper out here. Jack must bring a table, and Di get out the alcohol-lamp, and make some chocolate. Ask mine host if he has a juicy steak, or some chops and fried potatoes, or a few fresh eggs, and we will have a cosy little feast.”

Amy was delighted. It seemed very odd to be eating on a piazza; but they did, indeed, have a cosy time.

It was quite dark before they finished, but the air was soft and balmy; and, though the beds were hard, they were glad to go to them, and sleep was not long in coming.

The morrow dawned beautifully clear; and they started early again on their travels, so that they would have time to rest during the middle of the day when the sun was hottest. One of the first farms they came to had a number of sheep, and the cries of a little lamb aroused their sympathy.

“Stop, Jack: there is a woman I want to speak to,” said Mrs. Emmet, as they neared the barn. The woman approached: she

had a pan of salt in her hand, and the sheep were crowding about her.

"What is the matter with one of those lambs?" asked Mrs. Emmet: "it cries so piteously."

"It hasn't any mother," said the woman, "and we've had it around the house so much that it has got sp'iled; but my man don't like no petting of animals, so it's had to be put back in the flock again."

"Poor little lammie!" said Amy.

"How much is it worth?" asked Mrs. Emmet.

"Do you want to buy it?" responded the woman.

"I don't know. Do you think we could carry it without much trouble?"

"How fur be ye goin'?"

"Not more than fifteen or twenty miles to-day."

"Good gracious! Why, it ain't much further to the Gap."

"No: we hope to reach there by evening."

"And what would ye be a-doin' with a

lamb there?" said the woman, in open-eyed wonder.

"Really, I cannot say," said Mrs. Emmet smiling, and turning towards Amy.

"Would you like to have it, Amy?"

The lamb had kept up its pitiful cry, and Amy was regarding it with longing looks.

"Oh! wouldn't I?" was all Amy could ejaculate in an ecstatic manner.

The woman picked it up, and put it in her arms, saying, —

"There, I don't mind givin' it to ye, so's ye'll be kind to it."

A cry of joy escaped Amy, as she hugged the woolly little creature in a close embrace; and Mrs. Emmet took out her purse, saying, —

"You are very kind; and, I assure you, we appreciate the tenderness which would make you willing to lose it, rather than have it unhappy; but I prefer to buy it. Will that do?"

She handed a dollar bill to the woman, who nodded her assent; and they drove on.

Amy was too happy to speak. She

thought she never had seen quite so lovely a lamb; and she was sure no one could be so nearly perfect as Mrs. Emmet, who looked complacently at her as she petted and stroked her little treasure, while Di and Jack grinned, and nudged each other, and muttered, "What next, I wonder!"

They were evidently used to the generous impulses of their mistress.

And so they journeyed on until midday; when the horses were unharnessed, and given all the oats they wanted, while Amy fed her lamb with clover, and tied a blue ribbon on its neck.

They had now reached the mountainous region, through which the Delaware winds so picturesquely, and were in sight of the high and narrow gorge which constitutes the "Gap." It was so wild and grand, that, leaving the carriage to Di and Jack, Mrs. Emmet and Amy strolled at their leisure, the lamb frisking by their side.

"O dear Mrs. Emmet!" said Amy. "I am so happy that it almost makes me dreary to think of my cousins at Burton Beach."

"How so, Amy?" said Mrs. Emmet, plucking the wild roses which grew in profusion about them.

"Why, it doesn't seem fair for me to have so much more fun than they," answered Amy.

If she could have known in what real trouble they were just at that moment, she would have been much more concerned; but Mrs. Emmet only said lightly, —

"Don't waste your pity, my dear: they think you much worse off, and only wonder how you can possibly endure the companionship of an old woman like myself; besides, they like their boating and fishing, and, most of all, their dressing and dancing, and I am afraid would not be very happy without excitement."

"I wish it wasn't so," said Amy: "they don't know what they miss."

"That is very true, they do not; nor does any one who is perpetually craving something artificial. But we will soon be in a large hotel again, and will find it difficult to be just as quiet and sympathetic as we might

wish ; one thing, however, I shall require of you, Amy, — some settled time for reading and writing ; and we *must* keep early hours. I have engaged rooms enough to enable us to have all the privacy needful. You are already looking like a different child, but I must have you well and strong before I take you home.”

“And will you really go with me to my home, Mrs. Emmet?”

“I should like to — very much.”

“And see my mother and father and aunt Kitty?”

“Yes, indeed: do you think they would care to know me?”

“Care! they would be ever so glad; and our spare room is just sweet — I know you would like it; and aunt Kitty makes such delicious buscuit; and perhaps the plums would be ripe — we have such nice plums; and mother’s cottage cheese every one says is so good; and father has a book-room, — it ought to be called a library, but it isn’t, though it is full of books, and I am sure you would find plenty to read: but I forget

that you have every thing so much nicer, I suppose," and Amy stopped short with a disconcerted look.

Mrs. Emmet had listened to her so sympathetically, that she laughed to see the sudden crest-fallen glance Amy gave her.

"It is dreadful to be thought such a Great Mogul, Amy: nothing that I have is any nicer than your generous and warm hospitality, and I am certain I shall like every thing you have told me about."

"But, all the same, I can't help wishing you hadn't every thing quite so grand," said Amy, with a little sigh.

"Don't let that distress you," laughed Mrs. Emmet again.

And so they chatted and rambled till tired, and glad to take to wheels again; and before night they were safely lodged in the hotel, where we will leave them, to see what Belle and Vincent have been doing.





CHAPTER VI.

A BALL.

IT was a beautiful night at Burton Beach. The waves were rolling in, one over the other, breaking in foam, which the moon made silver. The stars shone, too, as if newly made; and one looked in vain up to the heavens for a cloud of even the size of a man's hand. Nature may seem to whisper of coming evil when the wind sighs in the tree-tops, or moans in the blast, but not when she smiles with the serenity of beauty and peace.

From the many-lighted windows of the hotels came sounds of mirth and music, for few found the charm of the night enough to win them from the gayety within. A children's ball was at its height; and little heads

which should have been pillowed, and little feet which ached to rest, were kept busy to the tune of waltzes and cotillons. It was a pretty sight for the thoughtless to gaze upon, so far as the fairy-like forms, in their glittering gauzes, moving gracefully, made it a scene of animation; but a sad sight for those who knew that the seeds of disease were sown in this way, that all the sweetness and innocence of childhood were being injured, as much so as wild flowers torn from the meadow would be wilted in an atmosphere of gas and heat. And yet, mothers and grandmothers looked on, and smiled approvingly.

Among the liveliest little dancers were Isabella and Vincent Travers. Active, lithe, and graceful, they were eagerly sought for as partners; and, though thoroughly wearied, they still kept on, long after Tillie and Clara had been taken off to bed. Miss Gaylord had been one of the most industrious managers of the entertainment, and had led in so many of the dances that it was not surprising that her own strength gave out, and

that she had allowed herself to be escorted upon the piazza for rest and an ice : but her long absence began to be noticed ; and Isabella told Vincent that he had better seek her, to know whether they should continue a favorite measure, or change it for another.

Pushing his way among the crowd of invited guests, hotel loungers, waiters, etc., the boy found a few people pacing about, but no trace of his aunt. No one could answer his questions, and the cool air was so refreshing that he dallied to enjoy it. But now the crowd was fast thinning : the gayest ones were departing, sleepy eyes were winking and blinking, little heads were drooping, little petulant voices were fretting and fuming ; the sparkle was all gone, and the flat, stale bitterness of satiety and fatigue had come. A bell-boy had thrust a paper in Vincent's hand while he had been looking for his aunt : he supposed it a letter or a bill, or something of even less importance, — perhaps a dancing-list, — and had put it in his pocket, and then had sat down to cool himself. Before he knew it, sleep overcame him.

Meantime, Miss Gaylord had come back from the sands, captured tired Isabella, and gone to her room. Nurse was asleep: no one missed Vincent, who, worn out with fatigue, sat in the treacherous coolness of the night air, sleeping heavily; and there he slept until the night watchman found him, long after every light was out, and the dim dawn was approaching.

Was it any wonder that the next day brought headache and fever, or that the boy forgot all about the missive in his pocket!

There it lay in the best clothes, — which were only worn on dress occasions, — with its message, short, sharp, decisive, unanswered.

In the worry next day about Vincent, Miss Gaylord did not hear the news of a heavy failure in the city, nor notice the looks bent towards her. Isabella had to amuse tired Tillie and Clara as best she could, though very wearied herself.

Another day went by, and there came a letter to Miss Gaylord, who fainted when she read it. It ran thus, —

MY DEAR CLARA, — Since no answer to our telegram has come, I shall be unable to meet you. In it I told you to return at once, as Edward and I leave town this evening. Edward is greatly depressed with all our trouble, the more so, that we are obliged to have the children come home; but there is no alternative. I have discharged all the servants: they were only too ready to go. When a ship is sinking, even the rats desert her. Old Ann has promised to come do the cooking. If nurse will remain, I will do my best to pay her: tell her so, and perhaps she will at least stay until I come back. Every thing will have to be sacrificed. Taintor has behaved most selfishly. Vincent will sell the house, but must go to Chicago first, and see what settlement can be made. It is dreadful to have the children come back to the city in hot weather, but I have no choice. If you cannot be with them, Isabella must do as well as she can without you, and be a sensible, prudent little woman; for there's very little money to do any thing with now. The papers exaggerate our debts, but they are not less than one or two hundred thousand dollars. I am writing most hurriedly, while Vincent is packing: he looks so ill and careworn that I cannot leave him even for the children. Kiss them for

YOUR UNHAPPY SISTER.

Isabella found this letter open on the floor, and, recognizing her mother's writing, read it.

She knew at once that her parents were in deep trouble. She knew, also, that Mr. Taintor — to whom her young aunt Clara was supposed to be engaged to be married, and who was in her father's business — must have acted badly, or her aunt would not have been so overcome. She had recovered from her fainting-fit, but was sobbing on nurse's shoulder; while Vincent tossed uneasily in his bed, asking what was the matter. With white faces, Clara and Tillie crept to her side, begging also to know what had happened.

"It is something about money," said Isabella; "and we've got to go home."

"Right off, to-night?" asked Tillie.

"No, not till we can pack;" and now a bright idea came to Isabella: she would busy the children in this way, and so divert them.

"Come," she said, "let's go pack, — you your dollies, and I the books."

Clara and Tillie began immediately, but Vincent called Belle to his bedside.

"What's all the row about, anyhow?" he asked.

"I think we are very poor: something dreadful has happened. Mamma and papa have to go to Chicago, and we've got to go home; and there are to be no servants; and we'll have to scrub and wash and iron, I suppose, like tenement-house people."

"Oh, you are humbugging me!"

"I wish I was, but you'll see it is all true: the letter says so. I wonder what we'll have to eat. I wish I had that quarter back that I spent for caramels yesterday. How Judith Spencer will crow over me when she knows it! she's just so horrid; but perhaps we won't go to school."

"That will be one good thing," said Vincent.

"I don't think so: it's common and vulgar not to be educated."

"But it's jolly not to have to study."

"Is it jolly to have to work?"

"That depends on what the work is."

"Would you like to be a cash-boy?"

"A what?" with a look of scorn.

"A cash-boy, or an errand-boy to run with messages and parcels."

"I'd go to sea first."

"That's harder work still."

"I don't know about that."

"But I do: I've read enough about the way boys are served at sea."

"Well, there are plenty other things one can do."

"There may be, for boys," said Isabella thoughtfully; then, with a sigh and a compression of her lips, she said, —

"I wish I were a boy!"

"Yes," said Vincent decidedly, "it is much nicer; though I say, Belle, you had lots of fun in the German, Wednesday night."

"So I did; but there'll be no more Germans, or any thing of that sort, for us, and no more nice dresses; and everybody will be saying how sorry they are for us. I do hate to be pitied."

"So do I; but there's one girl will be glad."

"Who?"

"Amy."

Belle gave a scornful little laugh, but she was on the verge of tears.

"It is what big people call a judgment: don't you think so?"

"No: for I don't know what a judgment is."

"Why, it is a sort of a serving right, when a feller has done wrong."

"I don't believe any such a thing," said Belle; but inwardly she was debating whether it might not be as Vincent said, especially, as he added, —

"You know we were awfully ugly to Amy, just because she was poor."

But here Isabella differed at once.

"It wasn't that at all; it was because — well — because I just didn't care any thing at all about her; and do you suppose God bothers himself about children's quarrels?"

Vincent pondered a while, and then replied, —

"What is that verse about the sparrows?"

"I don't remember."

"Let's look for it," which they did, in the tenth chapter of St. Matthew.



CHAPTER VII.

A BRIGHT IDEA.

IT was Saturday morning before Vincent could be dressed, or Miss Gaylord was equal to the exertion of the journey to the city. The children found some amusement in the excitement of their departure, but none in the heat, dust, and bad air of the dirty streets of New York. They arrived in the afternoon, when all up-town is stagnant and dull, and all down-town is hurried and noisy. Clara and Tillie were the only happy ones of the party. For them, every thing had a bright side; but nurse was worried and fagged, aunt Clara pale and listless, and Vincent weak and irritable.

Isabella had turned over a new leaf in the book of her experience, and was beginning

to think as well as to feel. She was too intelligent a child not to realize, in a measure, how altered their lives were to be: indeed, her imagination outran the reality, and painted for her pictures of absolute suffering. In every pallid child playing in the gutter, she saw a possible companion; and she wondered how she would act, and in what way other people would be affected by it. Her pride, however, was great; and she made up her mind to bear whatever came with as good a grace as possible. She had been taught to believe in God and in the Bible; but, as a very present help in time of trouble, she knew nothing of that One whose every thought towards us is merciful. The same might be said of her aunt, who was but a thoughtless young lady, and little versed in sorrow. To get rid of trouble is the first impulse of such a nature as Clara Gaylord's; and, so soon as she received an invitation from some intimate friends to visit them, she left her nephew and nieces to Nurse, in the great empty house, which had been arranged for the summer, with mirrors and pictures

draped, to protect them from the flies and dust, and every handsome article of furniture muffled in linen or tied up in gauze for the same purpose.

It was dreary enough to be within doors at all after the freedom of the seashore. Children need air and space and sunlight as much as, nay more than, any other created thing, and the summer seems made for them to enjoy; but it was worse to have every thing wearing so desolate an aspect; for the floors were bare, and their footsteps echoed on the stairs, and there was no going and coming, no visitors, no movement of any sort except their own. Vincent would not be controlled by nurse, and would wander off to the docks, up to the park, anywhere, so that he could get out of the house, and be his own master, as he called it; leaving them anxious as to where he was, or who his companions might be, and fearful lest in the heat he might be sun-struck.

Old Ann, the cook, grumbled because she had to do the washing. She had not been in the habit of doing it, and she didn't like it

Nurse would not help her because "it wasn't her place to do it," and because she had all the mending and darning to attend to. They differed, too, as to whose duty it was to keep the house clean; and neither of them would wash windows or polish door-knobs. Their conversation was not elevating, and their spirits were much cast down at the prospect of lessened wages and new situations.

The letters from Chicago were merely a few lines of affection, — hoping that the children were well and good; and each one deferring the father's and mother's return. Isabella found this all intensely dreary; and Vincent, having staid out very late one evening, came upon her in a dark corner, crying bitterly.

In his clumsy, boy fashion, he tried to comfort her; but the pent-up feelings had burst into a storm, and there was no cessation for a long while. As she quieted down, he managed to make her answer his questions; and they exchanged sentiments after their own way.

"I say, Belle," said Vincent, putting his

arm about her, "I wish you were a boy: it is plaguey hard to stick in the house all day, and suck your thumbs."

"I don't do any thing so nasty," responded Belle, half smiling through her tears; "but I suppose I know what you mean: I don't do any thing very much better. I'm tired of reading, and Clara and Tillie have their dolls. I never did care for dolls. O Vin! I wish we could do something for ourselves."

"I wish we could; can't you think of something?"

"I've thought and thought of lots of things."

"What sort?"

"Ways of making money."

"Oh! I didn't mean that: I meant something in the way of fun."

"But, don't you think it would be great fun to make money, and — and perhaps help papa?"

"Yes," said Vincent, not altogether convinced.

"Vin," said Belle, half pushing him from her, "I do believe you are afraid of work."

"I'm not," said Vincent stoutly. "I know well enough I've got to some time or other, but there's no use in being in any hurry about it."

"Yes, there is, when so much has been lost as we have lost. Don't you see how dreadful it is? And it is going to be worse, for I heard nurse tell Ann that the sheriff was coming here soon."

"Who is he? and what has he to do with it?"

"I don't know; only they always do come, Nurse says, when people are unfortunate: and it is altogether horrible, I can't endure it."

Here there came a fresh burst of sobs.

"Oh, don't, Belle! What is the use of going on so?" said Vincent gently.

"I don't suppose it does do any good," responded Belle, wiping her eyes, and quite touched by Vincent's sympathy, as he asked her what things she had been thinking about in the way of making money. Deliberately checking her depression, she unfolded several plans, all but one of which met Vincent's instant disapproval. With true masculine instinct, he denounced them as impracticable

and visionary ; but one suggestion, like a little seed, took root, was nourished, grew.

Belle saw approval in his eyes, felt it in his impetuous and eager seizure of the idea, and, like a wise little woman, forbore cumbering the general plan with details.

They agreed to think it over in silence, to meet in the same corner the following evening when Tillie and Clara should be in bed, to say nothing to Nurse or to Ann ; and then they kissed each other for good-night, and went to their beds.

It was one of July's hottest nights. The very bricks of the house seemed to bake, and all the air to burn. No cooling dews touched the town with tender pity. No breeze fanned its weary citizens. Almost as pitiless as the Day, did Night fold her suffocating cloak about the people. Far away on the beach broke the surf, with cooling moisture ; far away on the meadows, crisp and green, fell the dew ; and from hill and dale went up the scented breath of flowers. But in the town little children wakened to weep, or tossed in unresting slumber.



CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

ISABELLA and Vincent had agreed to meet, and talk over their plan; but Vincent was so late in returning home the following evening, that his sister began to think he had lost all interest in it, and so tired was she that sleep overcame her.

Although it was evening, it had not long been dark; and old Ann had gone out to get some provisions. Nurse was dozing up-stairs, and Tillie and Clara were in bed. Isabella had curled herself up in a corner like a dormouse; but she was presently aroused by some one attempting to step past her; and, thinking it was Vincent, she jumped up with a quick exclamation, which was instantly checked by seeing a stranger—a rough-look-

ing man, with a scar on his face — standing beside her.

“Who are you?” she asked, in a little spasm of terror, which passed quickly away as she saw the man begin to retreat.

“Are you a friend of Ann’s?” she added.

“Oh, yes!” said the man, smiling now at the easy way out of his predicament. “I am a friend of Ann’s, to be sure.”

“What do you want of her? She is out,” said Belle.

“I only wanted to see her. I was just passing by, and saw the door open; and so I thought I would walk in.”

Isabella did not like the man’s looks: he was not nice, and he gazed at her with a saucy, insolent expression, as he said, —

“When will Ann be home?”

“Very soon, I think, and so will Vincent.”

“Who is that?” said the man.

“My brother.”

“Oh!” said the man uneasily. “Is he big?”

“Not so very,” said Isabella, indisposed to be exact, yet not wanting to be untruthful.

"And has Ann any thing good to eat, do you think? or to drink?"

"No, I am sure she hasn't for any big man who is able to get it for himself. She saves scraps for poor children."

"I have three or four kids who would like a bite," said the man.

"Do they know that you go about begging this way?" said Belle, now thoroughly indignant.

"Can't say," said the man, with a leer. "But, p'raps you have some pennies in your pocket."

"If I had, do you think I would give them to you?" said Belle; then, softening as she thought perhaps his children were very very poor, she added, —

"Would you buy bread for your little ones, if I had?"

"Don't know, — p'raps, p'raps not; but if you would be so kind, I'd be obliged."

Belle rummaged in her pocket, all the while thinking how Vincent would blame her, and how much they needed every pennÿ themselves. At last she brought out a five-cent piece, saying, —

"I am really poor myself, so I can't give you any more."

The man laughed, took the coin, looked uneasily about, and stepped out of the door, to which they had gradually approached.

"I say," he said, "tell Ann not to leave her door open again, or she may have more callers than is agreeable."

"I will," said Belle, greatly relieved to have him depart, and wondering if he really knew Ann.

It was a very unpleasant incident, for it certainly did look as if the man were dishonest; and for a long time Belle could not get rid of the disagreeable impression his face had made. She wondered what sort of children he had, and whether he was kind to them. Perhaps he was not so bad as she feared, for he might have been much ruder and uglier to her. Then Vincent came home, and she told him what had happened. He was angry that she had given the man any money, and at Ann for leaving the door open.

"Of course he came to steal," said Vin-

cent. "A man who would walk into a house that way would do any thing bad."

"But he said he knew Ann."

"Oh, certainly! he'd say any thing to get out of a scrape; but he was a bad fellow, you may be sure. And now let us see how much we've got altogether. On the whole, you were pretty plucky, Belle."

"I tried not to let him see that I was frightened. But do you really believe he was a thief?"

"Very likely."

"He might have knocked me over as easy as — as a feather."

"Poor little sis," said Vincent.

"Anyway, I'm glad I didn't scream, or make a fuss."

"So am I."

Then they plunged into the depths of their proposed project.

"How much do you think we'll need for capital?" asked Belle anxiously, in answer to the very emphatic opinion that "there was no doing any thing without capital;" though to her mind's eye she saw only a big

capital *A*, such as is in primers and first reading-books.

"Well, I don't know: how much have you got?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I had fifty or seventy-five cents. There may be more in that old tin bank; but some of it is Tillie's, and she wants it for missionaries."

"Bother the missionaries: charity begins at home," said Vineent impatiently.

"But it shouldn't stay there," said Belle, with more wisdom than she knew.

"If Tillie is to be benefited, why can't we use what is in the bank?" asked Vineent, knowing that his reasoning was defective, but wanting Belle's stronger mind to meet the difficulty.

"You know well enough, Vincent, that we have no right to use any thing that does not belong to us, no matter *who* is benefited," answered Belle very promptly.

"I don't see much harm in it."

"But it is there, whether you see it or not: it would be very wrong."

"How would it do to have Till for a

partner, and so get her to give us the money?"

"Why don't you find out first if it is necessary? She's so easily scared, that she might think we were going to do something dreadful, and tell Nurse; and *that*, you know, would spoil every thing. Go up-stairs, and get your box; and we'll count, and see just how much we've got altogether.

Vincent did as Belle directed, and together they counted and recounted their little hoard.

It was all in dimes, half-dimes, and nickels; and each piece had its own little history. This had been given for one object, that for another. They each knew their own purpose in regard to its disposal, but they willingly set aside their individual intentions for the greater plan they had before them.

"It must be grand to have just as much as one wants," said Vincent, plunging his hands through the pennies, and chinking them one against the other.

"Yes," said Belle, a little dreamily, "if one could be sure of not becoming miserly, and hoarding and hoarding, like the old man

in the piece of poetry, who was found dead with all his gold about him, — he had starved, you know.”

“Had he? Well, he couldn’t turn it into bread; but he could have bought lots of cake.”

“Yes, if he could have got out of his dungeon or vault, or wherever it was he kept his money; but he was old and weak, and hadn’t strength to crawl away.”

“Yes, I remember; but I’d run the risk of having lots, and spending it too.”

“Well, here’s a dollar and a half,” said Belle, ending the argument. “That’s all you and I have to spend now, so no matter about the time when you may have more: I daresay you’d think you had not half enough. I’m *so* sleepy I can’t talk any more: put it all in your pocket-book, and let’s go to bed.”





CHAPTER IX.

BELLE'S PROJECT.

IT was a clear morning, but a very warm one; and, though the brother and sister had passed a restless night, they were eager to undertake their new project. This had to be conducted with great caution: for, though it appeared perfectly feasible and right to them, they were sure the servants would regard it as absurd and irrational; and nothing wounds an imaginative child more than the application of ridicule.

"They would first scold, and then they would laugh at us," said Vincent, jingling the money, which fairly burned his pocket, and waiting impatiently for Isabella, who was looking for a basket.

"I think this will do," she cried, coming

out of a closet. "You see, it has a cover, and will keep the hot sun off."

"Off of what?" asked Tillie, coming in most inopportunately from the back-yard.

"Something I'm going to get," answered Vincent in a vague way.

"Oh! is it a kitten? or rabbits? or white mice?"

"No," said Vincent again, in that way which was so mysterious.

"Then, it must be a puppy," said Tillie, clapping her hands. "Oh, how lovely! dear little Clara will be so glad, — she wants something alive. We're so tired of baby-houses and blocks and dolls; and there are no chickens or pigeons here in the hot city, not even pigs. I'd be glad to play — almost — in a pigsty, if it was cleaned out, and scrubbed, and had fresh straw in it: it would be lots of fun."

"Well, if you want those things, you must be good, and not bother us with questions; for Vincent and I are going to try and make some money, and then we will take you to the country; and who knows but what we

may be able to buy a house and a barn, and all the cows and horses and chickens and pigs that we need?"

Tillie's eyes opened wide with wonder. "Really!" was all she could say, while Belle went on romancing.

"I have often heard of the great deal of money made by old beggars, who in the daytime sat on street-corners in their rags, and at night counted their gold, which they had hidden away in chinks and crannies."

"But you are not going to be a beggar, Belle," said Vincent.

"Of course not," said Belle, looking indignant. "I was only thinking how they must have saved little by little, and wondering if we would have the patience, when we want so much, and want it so soon; for you know you'd be a grown-up man, and I a woman, if we waited very long; besides, I want every thing pretty, — a Queen-Anne house, painted olive-green and red, and tiles in it, with a lovely lawn, and old-fashioned chimneys, and andirons, and a sundial, and a peacock, and, —

"Oh! you forget all about the chickens and pigs," reminded Tillie.

"No, I don't: I hadn't got to those; for the big kitchen for old Ann would come first, and a Dutch eloeck in a corner, and a wide settee all earved, where we could sit, and tell stories in the dark, and —

Here Vincent put in a demurrer.

"No, thank you; not after last night's performance."

"Hush?" said Belle quickly, glaneing at the two little children. "You forget, Vin."

"What does he forget?" asked Tillie, instantly suspicious. "I think it's real mean of you and Vincent to have so many secrets. When I get big, I won't tell you any thing, will you, Clara?"

"No," said little Clara, pouting, and trying very hard to be angry, but smiling, in spite of herself, when Vineent tickled her nose with a feather.

"I tell you, Belle, we must go," said Vincent; "it is getting late."

"Where are you going?" asked Tillie.

"Oh, somewhere!"

"I mean to tell nurse."

Vincent began to look like a thunder-gust, but Belle came to the rescue.

"If you won't, Tillie, we'll promise to bring you home something."

"What will it be?"

"I don't know yet, but something very, very nice."

"Are you sure?"

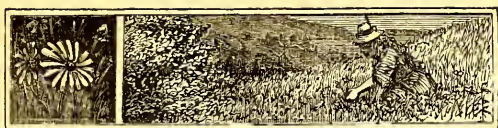
"Yes, I'll do my very best."

"Then, I'll promise not to tell."

So off they went. The long, warm day dragged its weary length to a close, — a day of growth and richness and sunny splendor on the farms, but a day only to be endured within brick walls. Tillie and Clara, in their little muslin slips, went out to play in a city square, when the sun was low; and nurse took her knitting to gossip with her neighbors on the benches. She knew that Belle was with Vincent; and, since Vincent had assumed to be his own master, she had weakly yielded to his wilfulness, and ridden herself of even the trouble of remonstrance. She was a woman of an easy, amiable temper,

but no force of character, — just one of the sort who are often considered by selfish or indifferent parents to be “a perfect treasure.” No person in a household should be chosen more carefully than the one to whom children are trusted; and yet how often are little ones given to the keeping of ignorant and indifferent women, who have not the faintest idea of the responsible nature of their duties! But even nurse was aroused to some sense of her failings, when the twilight verged into night, and still there was no appearance of either Vincent or Isabella. “Where had they gone? Why did they not come?” Old Ann stood at the basement-door, in an agony of apprehension.





CHAPTER X.

THE LOST LAMB.

THREE weeks of constant but quiet pleasure had Amy passed in Mrs. Emmet's society. Together they had rambled in the woods, and gathered wild flowers, pressed ferns, and secured beautiful moths and butterflies for Mrs. Emmet's collection. Together they had driven over the mountain roads, and seen every point of interest. Wherever the lamb could be taken, it had also accompanied them, even in the boat, gliding down the Delaware; and every day Amy made a fresh garland for its neck, which served two purposes, — first as ornament, and second as food; for the prettiest blossoms were nibbled remorselessly. Amy had tried to sketch her pet; but the funny

little fellow was sure to make some movement of head or tail, which upset her artistic attempts; and the result was much after the pattern of a toy Noah's-ark animal.

The sweet, pure air, so full of life and refreshing coolness, had brought the color back to Amy's cheeks. She went to bed early, and rose, not with the lark, but with the first bell, and was known by all the hotel people as the little girl who was never in the parlor. She lived out of doors, and when not with Mrs. Emmet, had all the babies who could toddle running after her for stories and games. It was no wonder, then, that her happy face was a little clouded when, after the arrival of the mail one morning, Mrs. Emmet began talking of going home.

"Oh, dear!" was all she could say; but it was said so dolefully, and with such an accent of despair, that Mrs. Emmet repeated it comically after her, adding with a smile, —

"Holidays do not last forever, Amy dear."

"Oh, no! of course not; but this has been so perfect."

"Then, don't you think other little people ought to have theirs?"

"Who do you mean, Mrs. Emmet?"

"I mean some poor little children, whose mothers and fathers have to work so hard that they have no time to take them to the country; children of one of our industrial schools, in charge of a good sister Mary, who writes to me that they are pining, and reminds me of a promise I made her, that the little ones should have an outing."

Amy was silent so long that Mrs. Emmet asked her what she was thinking of.

"I was thinking how lovely it was to be able to do any thing so nice; but I was thinking, too, that now you would not be able to go home with me, to see mother and aunt Kitty; and I was wondering if it was very wicked and selfish in me to wish that some one else would take those poor children away."

"Maybe it was a little selfish, dear; what then?"

"Then I must try not to wish it, I s'pose. But oh, dear Mrs. Emmet! it will be a dreadful disappointment."

“Then, I must put *my* wits to work, and see how I can manage to make everybody happy.”

Amy gave a little twirl of delight, and, as Mrs. Emmet drew out her writing materials, danced off to see to her lamb, but in another minute came back in consternation, crying, —

“My lamb is gone! my lamb is gone!”

Mrs. Emmet looked up from her writing, to see tears springing into Amy’s eyes.

“Where did you leave him, dear?”

“Where I always do, tethered in a shady spot by the brook. Don’t you know what a pretty place it is? where the forget-me-nots grow so thickly.”

“Are you sure he was there?”

“Quite. Jack always puts him in the stable at night, and I take him to the brook directly after breakfast. Oh! where can he be?”

Mrs. Emmet folded her paper-case, closed her inkstand, and put on her shade-hat, saying, —

“Come, we will go look for him.”

But looking was in vain: there was no

trace of the lamb, and no one had seen him. A cluster of sympathetic children divided, and scoured the grounds, but without finding the missing pet.

As they passed the stables, a man came up, and spoke a few words to Mrs. Emmet, who listened intently; then, motioning for Amy to follow her, she sped up the ravine, which was dark, even at noonday.

"Has he seen him? does he know any thing about it?" inquired Amy anxiously.

"Wait till we get farther away from the house: it will not be well to alarm the other children. The man says there have been gypsies about."

"Real gypsies, such as are in story-books?" queried Amy.

"Yes, as real as any others, I suppose. I have my doubts as to them all: they seem to me only a lazy, wandering set of beggars, ready to lay hands on any thing that will bring money or food."

"Oh, my poor little lammie, my poor little pet! I hope they have not eaten you," cried Amy.

“They have hardly had time, my dear; and, before we imagine him roasted, let us see what we can do to save him from so sad a fate.”

The path they were treading was a narrow one, leading up to a wood-road where they had often been in search of ferns: it led to a dense thicket of young birch and beech trees, through the tender leaves of which the sun shone goldenly. From this, they emerged upon the road which followed the curve of the mountain: it was canopied with pines and hemlocks, which made a dense shade, even at noonday. Amy’s heart was heavy; but her feet were light, as she tripped over the stones and fallen branches, pushing aside all the obstacles as well as she could from Mrs. Emmet’s way. Birds twittered, squirrels chattered; and the voice of a brook made melody, as it poured itself over mossy stones on its journey to the river.

“Hark! I hear voices,” said Mrs. Emmet, pausing to rest on her mountain staff. “Go on a little way by yourself, Amy, while I wait here, and get my breath; perhaps you may see somebody.”

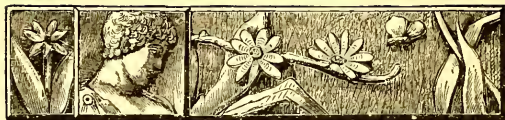
Amy did as she was bidden. The road took a sudden twist, and brought her face to face with a very novel scene.

In a grassy glade, through which the stream ran merrily, and beneath the shelter of some fern and lichen-covered rocks, was a group of people of every age, from the old dame to the baby in arms. Some were busy gathering brush for the bonfire which had just been started for the noonday meal, others were plucking fowls to stew in the big iron pot hanging on the forked sticks, and others were erecting a tent. Tied to the larger trees were horses unharnessed from the vans, which stood farther away, and which had every appearance of household comfort, being furnished with chairs and beds, and even muslin curtains, trimmed with lace, and tied with ribbon. Two or three yelping curs ran in and out amongst the goats and horses. A woman was milking one of the goats. Boys, stretched at full length on the sward, kicked their heels, and whistled to the dogs. A girl of Amy's age was dipping out water from the brook for the tea-kettle; and an old crone

in a big red cloak and ruffled cap smoked a clay pipe, while her fingers kept up a rapid clicking of knitting-needles. It was a scene of rude comfort, made picturesque by its setting of summer beauty, — the green, interlacing leaves, the broad lights and shadows, the velvet turf, the running water, and the nodding ferns upon the gray and reddish rocks. The people themselves were a motley crew, — old and young, light and dark; burned with the sun, and browned with tan; dressed in every variety of color, but yellow and red predominating; with faces in which the coarser emotions had left their traces, but which also bore a look of careless mirth, — mirth which could easily be turned to wrath, as Amy soon saw; for at that moment one of the boys, stretching his legs too far, tripped the girl who had been getting water, upset her kettle, and very nearly knocked her down. In an instant there was an uproar, — two other boys set upon the one who caused the mischief, the old woman scolded, the men swore, the dogs barked, and the babies cried; but through all the racket

came a little sound which made Amy's heart jump for joy: yes, she was sure she heard the soft bleating of her little lamb. So eager did it make her, that, forgetful of all prudence, she pushed aside the boughs, drew her thin dress from the detaining brambles, and in another moment stood among the throng.





CHAPTER XI.

GYPSIES.

“**H**I, little lady! where did you come from?” was the surprised exclamation of one of the men, as the gypsies gathered about Amy; and many were the “How-d’ye-dos” and “Good-days” and “Good-morrows,” while the children pressed closer to examine her, even touching her clothes, and pulling at her ribbons.

Amy looked about her with some trepidation, shrinking from the dirty and curious little fingers, but still intent upon her purpose.

“I have come for my lamb,” was all she said.

“What lamb, my dearie? whose lamb? You’re a little lamb yourself,—as pretty a

little lamb as ever I saw," said the old woman in the ruffled cap, pushing through the crowd, and taking the pipe out of her mouth only long enough to speak.

"I mean *my* lamb," said Amy. "It has been taken from the hotel grounds, or it has strayed away."

"Oh, yes! that is what has happened. Lambs always stray: I never had one that didn't."

"But did you take good care of it, and feed it, as I did mine?"

"Certainly, my little lady, fed it on cream and roses; that's the way we always feed our lambs, and they always stray away, always — to the butchers, ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh! you are joking," said Amy, "I know; and hark! there's my lamb, bleating now. Oh, please give it to me! please do!"

A loud laugh went up on all sides, — a laugh which made Amy shiver; and many a rude jest was thrown at her, while the children pressed closer. She looked around anxiously for a way of escape, but she was now the centre of this incongruous and

curious crowd. Some of the faces were sullen and handsome, some were sharp, and others were dull; but all were dirty and disagreeable.

"I want my lamb: you must give it to me," she said, aroused now to anger and aversion.

Another laugh followed.

"How do you know we've got it, little missie?" said one of the men.

"I hear it bleat."

"Can't there be more lambs than one?"

Amy made no reply; conscious that she could give no proof that the lamb she claimed was her own, but looking from one sunburned face to the other, she thought she saw a gleam of kindness in the old woman's eyes; turning, therefore, to her, she said very sweetly, —

"I know that my lamb is here: if I give you some money, will you let me have it?"

"Let's see, first, what you've got in that pretty pocket. My eyes, what a handkercher! so fine and nice, with embroidery in the corner. I do declare, that's too nice for

my nose ; but it would tie on Popsy's pate. Here, Moll, hold Popsy till I put this on him for a cap : now doesn't he look cunnin' ? " As she spoke, she arranged the handkerchief on the big, fat, brown baby, whose tawny locks stood like bristles on his head. Amy made no resistance at the indignity, for she felt that it would be useless ; and again the old woman fumbled in her pocket, and brought out a pencil, a needle-case, and a thimble.

"Humph !" grunted the woman, "no money here," and tossed the useless articles to the children, a look of anger chasing away the smile, as she said roughly, —

"What makes you talk about chink when you haven't got any?"

Amy now was really frightened, for she had thought that the old crone was the one from whom she might hope for justice. Tearing the pocket from her grasp, she essayed to run ; but the people closed in upon her as if she had been a wild animal whom they must not let escape, and, with jeers and taunts, detained her. Just at this moment,

when Amy's face was blanched with terror, one of the men gave a shrill whistle; and, with a quick movement, they all fell back as rapidly as they had gathered, leaving only the old woman near Amy; and, to her surprise, the beldam's face was again wreathed in smiles, as she picked up the various things she had been scrutinizing, — the handkerchief, thimble, and needle-case, — and presented them, saying in the most wheedling way, —

“My little lady mustn't mind our wild ways, no, she mustn't; and she must let the old gypsy tell her fortune, so she must, — and how she's to be rich and grand, and have a coach-and-four, and wear silks and laces, and marry a rich man.”

Amy could hardly believe her ears; and she was so trembling yet, with fear, that she had to lean against a tree for support, when the cause of this sudden change became apparent. It was Mrs. Emmet coming down the path.

The old woman courtesied till her scarlet gown swept the grass, and began at once a

voluble welcome, blessing the day which brought their tribe a visit from so fine a lady.

Amy flew to Mrs. Emmet, and put her arms around her, whispering, —

“I was dreadfully frightened, they were so rough and cross; and I know they have my lamb, I heard him cry; but they were angry because I had no money. Oh, do let us go home as soon as we can!”

“In a few minutes, my love: if they have the lamb, we must try to get him from them. Are you sure it is here?”

“I cannot be quite sure, but they were pleased when I spoke of money. I thought you would let me give them some.”

“Certainly;” and, turning to the nearest man, Mrs. Emmet said, —

“Have any of you seen the little lamb we are in search of?”

“Well, ma’am, it would be hard to tell: lambs are so much alike,” was the answer.

“Yes, that is true; but ours is marked: he has a small “A” branded on him; besides, he had a blue ribbon on his neck.”

“If you would just walk a bit this way,

ma'am, and take a look at our cattle, perhaps it might be among them."

Mrs. Emmet followed the man; and Amy would have kept closely beside her, but for the strange gestures of a girl, the one who had been so nearly tripped while she was filling the tea-kettle. With a keen, quick look towards the old woman, she began to speak as one might do to a deaf person, — mouthing the words in an earnest desire to be understood, and yet uttering no sound.

Curiosity overcame Amy's terror as she watched the girl, who stopped her motions instantly when the old woman turned her head, and began again as soon as she was unobserved. "What could she mean? What was she trying to say?" Evidently something of importance, for her looks were eager and impressive.

The man who led the way for Mrs. Emmet was very polite, and endeavoring to make a favorable impression.

"The little lady had been somewhat alarmed at their rudeness, but they hadn't meant any harm: they were mild and peace-

able, and never wanted to molest anybody.”
“You see, ma’am,” he went on to say, “we live in a free and easy way; but we mind our own business, after all.”

“And what is your business?” asked Mrs. Emmet. “I did not know you had any.”

“Oh! there never was a greater mistake, lady. We men deal in horses, and our women make lace and tell fortunes. To be sure, the work isn’t hard in fair weather; but when there comes a rainy spell, and our hay gets wet, and our bones ache with the rheumatiz, and food is scarce, we don’t have every thing to our liking.”

“But why do the country people fear you? Why have you gained their ill-will?”

The man’s brow darkened.

“There’s good and bad all over, and two sides to every thing.”

“Not to lying and stealing, or barn-burning,” thought Mrs. Emmet; but she gave no expression to her thoughts.

They had now reached the spot where the cattle were tied. Some of the horses were as sleek and well-groomed as if just

from the stables, as perhaps, indeed, they were; others were like their owners, coarse, shaggy, and wild-eyed. They whinnied as the man approached, and pushed their noses over his shoulder and into his hands, from which they nibbled at the corn he took from his pocket. A little way off, under some maple-trees, were the goats, and beside them a lamb, so dirty, so woe-begone, that Amy's heart ached to think it might be hers.

"Is that the critter?" asked the man, pointing to the lamb, which was bleating piteously.

"Mine had a blue ribbon," said Amy, distracted between the abject appearance of her pet and the frantic efforts of the gypsy girl to make herself understood.

"That might easily have been lost," said the man, smiling grimly; for the very girl who was following them had the blue ribbon, somewhat the less dainty for dirt, in her hair.

"Of course," said Mrs. Emmet; "but if the brand is there, I think I must claim it."

"I don't think it's quite certain, ma'am; but, since you have taken so much trouble

about the critter, if you'll just allow me something for having picked it up on the road, and driven it along, I don't mind giving it to you."

Mrs. Emmet made no remonstrance: she felt that it was useless where people had so little moral sense; so, drawing out her purse, she paid the man as much for the lamb as she had done when she bought it; though she was quite certain the lamb had neither strayed nor wandered, but, in plain English, had been stolen. She did this because she knew she could prove nothing, even if she had the man arrested. Amy led her pet, by the bit of twine about its neck, away from the goats, and it frisked at sight of her; but its pure white fleece was so sullied that she could not clasp it in her arms. The gypsy people smiled, the old dame courtesied, and begged to cross their palms with gold; but Mrs. Emmet hastily turned away from their camp.

The last thing Amy saw, was the gypsy girl standing on the bank of the brook, her black locks hanging about her face, on

which was a mournful expression. Again, she made those singular motions, looking fearfully about, to see if any one beheld her, and striving most uncouthly to make something known which might not be audibly uttered. What could it be?





CHAPTER XII.

YOUNG ADVENTURERS.

WHILE old Ann, the Traverses' cook, stood at the basement-door of the big, empty, shut-up house, which looked as if no one ever lived in it, and in which no one would have guessed there were two sleeping babies, and from which had gone forth our two young adventurers, there drove up a cab, and from it alighted pretty Miss Gaylord, with a friend whom she addressed as Mr. Taintor. The troubled appearance of the old servant did not escape the notice of the lively young lady, who shook out her duster, and tossed down her bag, saying, as she fanned herself, —

“Oh, how warm it is! Do bring ice-water! and where are the children?”

"That's just what I can't tell you, miss," replied the old woman; "it's I that have worried and worried meself the last half hour, wid wishin' they'd come home."

"Why, you don't mean to say they are out as late as this?"

"Indade, an' I do! Master Vincent has a way o' stayin' and stayin', but this time he has his sister wid him; an' it's not a dacent thing for a young slip of a gurl to be out in the strate at this hour. I can't think what has become o' thim; and it's only last night, there was a strange man came to the house; an' between such goin's-on, I'm most distracted."

"Who was the strange man? Did he leave a message?"

"Not that I knows of, miss, but it has scared us all; and now to have the childers stayin' out so late is a very thryin' thing. I've been to the corner a dozen times in a minute, but not a sight o' thim can I behold."

"Where can they have gone?"

"I've no knowledge, miss."

"How came nurse to allow it?"

“When the cat’s away the mice will play, miss. Nurse minds Miss Tillie and Clara mostly, and lets Master Vincent and Miss Belle mind theirselves.”

Miss Gaylord said nothing: her own conscience was troubled; and turning to Mr. Taintor, who had paid the cabman, and sent him away, said, —

“What must I do?”

The young man shrugged his shoulders, twirled his mustache, and smiled as he said carelessly, —

“Oh, they’re all right! How old is the boy?”

“Eleven or twelve, I forget which. Belle is a year younger.”

“Master Vincent is thirteen, at laste,” said Ann.

“Then they know enough to take care of themselves, you may be sure.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Certainly; and now come sing me some of those pretty songs.”

“Oh, really, I do not think I can!” said Miss Gaylord, following him to the parlor,

and leaving Ann in the hall looking the picture of despair; but, feeling that she owed something to her guest, she opened the piano, and sat down before it. Mr. Taintor was an idle, luxurious young man, whose unwise conduct had been the principal cause of Mr. Travers's business trouble. His intimacy with Miss Gaylord was not liked by her best advisers: and even as she sang his favorite songs, and listened to his flattering words, she felt that he was following out the bent of his selfish inclinations; for it was really becoming very late, and she was much alarmed, as he could easily see. At last she arose, and said, —

“You really must excuse me. I am fatigued from my journey, and must retire — as soon as I can do so with any assurance that the children are safe.”

Aroused now to some sense of his uncourteous indifference, he made all sorts of conjectures and propositions, offering to go to the police-station; but Miss Gaylord declined his tardy assistance, preferring to send Ann for one of her humble friends.

Mr. Taintor then bowed himself off, and out of our story ; but the delay occasioned by his action was just enough to render futile the efforts of the faithful old man, Dennis O'Brien, who left his bed to go in search of the missing children. All night he wandered about, asking this one and that one, describing them as well as he could, but failing utterly : and all night Clara Gaylord walked up and down the lonely, lofty parlors of her sister's house, feeling the pangs of remorse, the wearisome anxiety of one who knows that she has failed in her duty ; for now she was sure she should not have left these young things to themselves. What could have become of them ? Where had they gone ? Why had they wandered ? Worn out with her fruitless vigil, she sat down to write telegrams and letters. Perhaps some caprice had led them to join their parents : she would at least hope that this might be the case ; and so when old Ann, pale and red-eyed with weeping, brought her a cup of coffee, she strove to drink it, and to say, with some degree of calmness, —

"We must hope for the best, Ann. I think they may have taken a train for the West: at all events, we shall soon know something."

"Soon, indade, miss, for jist look here," and the woman pointed towards a corner, where stood a boy, so pale, so weary, and so utterly cast down, that his aunt could scarcely bring herself to believe it was Vincent. Springing to her feet, she would have embraced him, but for his sullen, sad, —

"Don't, I can't bear it, I don't deserve it; for — I — cannot find Isabella."

"Wasn't she with you?" asked Miss Gaylord.

"Yes, but we got separated. Oh, dear! how I wish we'd never gone!"

"Where have you been?"

Miss Gaylord and Ann put the question together, one on each side of him, and both had a hand on his arm.

"Everywhere, — all over town, way down town."

"What for?"

"We wanted to make some money: we thought it would be fun. Belle planned it."

“What did you do?”

“We went down to Staten Island, and gathered wild flowers. Belle thought they would sell better than roses and things that any one can get at the flower-stores; and then we tied them up in bunches, and people bought them. But oh, my! how they stared at us, and how queer we felt, and how we wished we hadn't done it! It was so hot, and we were so tired; and it was so strange to have money, though at first we had thought it would be jolly; and I bought a lot of fruit. But when people began to ask us questions, and look at us as if we were crazy, Belle began to be ashamed; and she said her feet were blistered, and her head ached; and a boy was rude to her, and I knocked him down, and a crowd gathered. And when I had fought two or three big rowdy micks, I got laid myself; and then a policeman came up, and sent every one flying; but I couldn't find Belle;” and here a great sob came, to end the long and despairing explanation.

“You poor, poor boy; and where did you

stay all night? Oh, if you had only come home, how much you might have saved us!"

"I couldn't come without Belle: I was looking every place for her. I was so frightened, and I'm sure I saw that man who came here the other night."

"Oh, no! you imagined it. You are so weary, you must go at once to bed. Belle is probably looking for you, or safe and sound at some friend's. Come, dear, let me bathe that poor black eye, and get your clothes off."

Vincent was too tired to resist, though he could not but wonder at the strange kindness with which Ann and nurse and his aunt Clara treated him. He felt so guilty of folly, that had been even worse in its result than mere folly, and so distressed about his sister, that it would have seemed only just had they all denounced him. He little knew the pity there is in all good hearts for those who go astray.





CHAPTER XIII.

BLASTED HOPES.

BUT where was Belle? She who had been the author of this "nonsense," as Miss Gaylord called it. In his heart, Vincent thought her brave, noble, wise. He remembered, with a pang, how full of life and fun she had been in the morning, when they had taken the big basket between them to the car, and then to the boat, and so to the shady country road, where ferns and daisies nodded a welcome to them, and they had filled the basket with their beauty. It had been so delightful to leave the noisy, dirty, hot city, with all its wearisome rush and roar; to sail on the blue bay, and watch the white sails flitting by, or the puffing, panting tugs, and the majestic steamers making

their way out to that broad, limitless ocean which was so great a mystery to these untravelled children.

And Belle had taken so much delight in twisting up her woodland treasures into pretty little nosegays, putting her head on one side to see if the effect was right, — a leaf here, a flower there, a spray of green to finish. They were almost too pretty to sell, she had said; and she had half a mind to take them all home to Tillie and Clara. How Vincent wished she had! though, at the moment, he had answered scornfully that “that was not the way to do business.” Then Belle had laughed, and said she supposed not, but that she was sure if she sold candies, she would never be able to resist the temptation to give them to every child that looked with longing eyes at them; and then Vincent had told her she was “ridiculous,” which spurred her on to be very sharp and severe, and ask absurd prices for her bouquets, which made people stare, and snub them. And so the pleasure of their expedition seemed to wane, like so many other

bright things which sparkle and glitter at first, but lose color and brightness when custom stales. They had been so cheery at first, so hopeful, so courageous; and when their pennies really did increase, they flattered themselves that their attempt would be successful, fully worth the sacrifice of some feeling; for Belle's pride had been sorely hurt at the outset, by having to carry the big basket, and bear the gaze of so many people. She had worn her plainest, oldest gown, and had left off every trinket that she was in the habit of wearing; but, in spite of all she could do, people did stare dreadfully; and she could not help wondering if Judith Spencer — her great friend at school, though she had once said she was "horrid" — would ever hear of this performance. Then came the big, bad boy, who snatched their flowers, and grabbed their money, and would have kissed Belle if Vincent had not knocked him down. He had been so excited, so furious at such an indignity, that he lost all idea of where he was, or what he was doing; and even now, as he thought of it in his quiet

bed, there came to him only the echo of a great uproar, a buzz of angry voices, shouts, yells, jargon of street sounds, jeers, whistles, and nowhere Belle.

He had sobbed till his whole frame was convulsed, and, from sheer weariness, silence had ensued, — sobbed with his head buried in his pillow, lest some one should hear him.

And then soft fingers had touched his aching brow, and a sweet little voice had said, —

“Dear Vinny, look up at Clara. I’s so lonely : my doll’s got a broken leg, and nurse can’t mend it. Won’t you please do sumpin to it?”

He sat up then, and tried to please little Clara ; but his head ached, and his hands trembled, and all the time he kept asking himself, “Where is Belle?” If only he had controlled his anger, and not fought that dreadful boy, he could have taken better care of his elder sister ; but certainly, if ever anger was just, his had been. And then he thought with great tenderness of all Belle’s goodness to him, her unselfishness, her cour-

age: her faults seemed very trivial, mere nothings. And what a pretty girl she was! What bright eyes, and soft hair, and white teeth! How well she carried herself! how skilful in all their games! almost equal to a boy. He wondered what his father and mother would think, what people generally would say; and then he thought of Amy, and wished that he knew something about her: for, notwithstanding his rude indifference and neglect, she had seemed to be a very nice little girl, — one who would not have laughed at this freak of Belle's, as he was sure Judith Spencer would do. He knew that everybody thought that Amy had been very fortunate in winning Mrs. Emmet's friendship, and he was very sorry Belle had not done the same: if she had, then every thing would have been different, and all this dreadful misery would have been averted. For an active boy who hated to be still, nothing could have been worse than to lie all the long, summer day thinking, thinking, as he had never done before; but there was nothing else to do. Nurse insisted upon his

staying in bed, and he was too weary to resist. Tillie brought him his tea and toast, and coaxed him to eat; but food choked him. Belle might be starving.

Miss Gaylord was out all the morning, so was nurse, and old Ann had to have the little ones with her in the kitchen, so that much of the time the poor boy was alone. Every time the bell rang, his heart leaped, and he listened breathlessly, only to be disappointed.

The room became like the walls of a prison, the air hot and thick, the sunbeams scorching. There were his tools, his toys, his microscope, his paint-box, his dumb-bells, his books: he wanted none of them. By and by his eye lighted on these words, "Be not far from me; for trouble is near."

"They were on the scroll of a "Silent Comforter," which his grandmother had hung in his room once when he was ill of some childish disorder, — one of those maladies which may only cause a ripple of solicitude in the family life, but again may be the forerunner of a great wave of desolation. He

knew what the words meant. They had been spoken by a great king to the great King of kings. They were a prayer for help. Could he use them now? Perhaps God would hear him. At least he would try. And so with meekness and earnestness he said some simple words—just the wish of his heart whispered to his heavenly Father; and the effort quieted his anxious thoughts, and brought a sense of trust and hope, the feeling, that, though he could do nothing, God could do all; and when Miss Gaylord came in towards evening, and the hot day was nearly over, and a faint breeze had risen to refresh the earth, she found Vincent sleeping like a baby.

“Hush!” she said to nurse, who was behind her. “We will not waken him, even to tell him what we hope; for he looks two years older, with all this worry and fright.”

“You’re right, miss,” said nurse very curtly, for she knew it would not be long before she would be dismissed. “He does look older, and he has acted badly enough

to need all the sleep he'll get: worry and fright you may well call it."

"No matter now what he has been," said Miss Gaylord kindly. "We are none of us free from blame, and many a boy might have been as foolish without having to suffer as Vincent has done."

"Children are a terrible bother when they choose," said nurse, in her most impressive manner, but wondering very much at the great change in the lively Miss Gaylord.

"She's not the same at all," was the verdict pronounced in the kitchen. "She's never been so quiet like; and as fur the way she has taken this mischief, without telegraphin' to the masther and misthris, fur fear o' dis-thractin' thim, I think it's jist wondtherful!"

"An' how she wint round to the perlice-stations, and talked and talked in that asy way she has," said old Dennis O'Brien, tipping back in his chair, and sipping the cup of fragrant tea old Ann had given him. "I niver in all me life saw the aqual of it; an' they not her own childer at all, at all, but only her nace and nephew. She looked bate

out till she got here, and that despatch came; an' to think it might have come sooner, but for that imp of a bye loiterin' on the corner: bedad, he should be throunced, an' it's I that would be glad to do it. Thim mes-singer-byes can do a sight of harm whin they delay."

"Dade, an' they can; but what did the despatch say?" asked Ann.

Dennis pulled a bit of paper from his pocket, smoothed out the creases, and, with some difficulty, proceeded to decipher the hastily written slip:—

Little gurl answering disthcription seen on a train from New York. Will follow the clue.

(Signed)

PAUL PRYOR,

Chief of Police, Easton, Penn.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE GYPSY GIRL.

AMY was busily packing, with Diadem-
ma's help. Mrs. Emmet had gone to
the city to be absent for a day; and, on her
return, they were all to start for Amy's
home, the pretty village of Beulah.

Packing was not very serious work, as
conducted on this bright afternoon by Amy.
She had taken all her dresses off the pegs,
and folded them carefully, or rather, she had
tried to; but Di had revised the various folds
and creases with the dexterity of an accom-
plished laundress, and they were all now in
an even pile upon the bed. Then she had
gathered her books from various corners, —
and books can never be handled without
dipping into them: it would be like meeting

a friend, and not saying "How d'ye do?" to pass them by; so at the end of an hour, the trunk was as empty as at the beginning. Then she took a fresh start, and actually put her best hat in the space designed for it, filling up the chinks with handkerchiefs. This was so well done that she had to rest a while, and contemplate it, what she should do next requiring also to be considered. Meantime, Di had filled one of Mrs. Emmet's boxes, and locked it. As Amy heard the click, she turned an astonished gaze upon Di.

"Is that all filled and finished, Di?"

"Course it is, chile: you jist play at pack-in'; Ise has to work."

Amy felt rebuked. "I ought to work too. Suppose you show me how."

"Carn't do it, missie; dem's one o' de t'ings ebberybody must larn fur demselbes. Yo's no call to work, any how."

"Oh, yes, I have! Do you suppose I am going to be idle all the days of my life?"

Di laughed.

"All de days ob your life are a long way off yit. Yo's nuffin' to do now but larf, and take t'ings easy."

Amy resented this idea entirely, and, to show her difference of opinion, dumped out her drawers and her work-basket, and began diligently to re-arrange and stow, winding spools and sorting worsteds, stuffing her boxes till they threatened to burst, and making a great show of her industry, when there came a low muttering of thunder; and, looking up, she saw that the sky was overcast.

"I must go put my lammie in a safe place before the storm comes," she said, and ran off, leaving Di to smile, and grumble, and pick up, and put in order, with a few deft touches, all that the child had left undone.

The lamb was tied in a shady place near a barn; and all Amy had to do was to untie him, and place him under shelter. While she was doing this, she saw a girl watching her; and, looking more carefully, she found that the ragged dress and hanging black hair of this girl resembled that of the one whose strange movements in the gypsy camp had so perplexed her. As they had gone back to the hotel, Amy had asked Mrs.

Emmet if she had noticed the singular movements of the girl; but she had not, nor could she account for them, except as something to excite Amy's curiosity in an idle way, and without any motive but childish folly. And so the matter had been forgotten; but it was now revived, for there stood the girl beckoning to her.

"At least, it can be no harm to ask her what she meant yesterday," said Amy to herself, as she shut the barn-door, and went over to the fence, behind which stood the girl.

Browned to nearly the color of a mulatto, with large black eyes, and hair of the same hue, the girl was a typical gypsy. She might have been pretty had she been clean and cared for; but she had the gaunt, impoverished look of one whose food is coarse, even if it be plenty; and her bare arms and legs were disfigured with bruises. As Amy approached, there was a strange play of expression on her countenance: a look of wonder and expectation were succeeded by anxiety and apprehension.

"Are you afraid of thunder?" asked Amy, by way of opening the conversation.

"No," said the girl, in a low voice, "not much: I'm used to it, though when it pounds down awful, I'm a little scared. One of our horses was struck once, 'cause it was tied under a big tree right out in an open medder."

"That was quite a loud peal. I think I'd better go in the house, unless you want to speak to me. What made you act so queer the other day?"

"What made *you* so stupid?" retorted the girl angrily.

"I don't know," said Amy gently. "Was I stupid?"

The girl's voice changed at once.

"*I* thought you were; but then, I'm not the one that ought to say so; I'm too stupid myself. I can't even write a letter or read a book."

"Oh!" said Amy, quite pitifully, "I'd like to teach you; but I am going away from here."

"So I heard," said the girl.

"Why, how did you hear?"

"Oh! we've all sorts of ways of hearing; but I may as well tell you that the chamber-maid who takes care of your room has been up to have her fortune told."

"Up where?"

"To our camp."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but I can't stand here: somebody'll see me; and I want to tell you something."

"Why can't you speak to me here?"

"Because, I tell you, somebody may see me; and I don't want to get licked," said the girl again, in an anxious tone of voice.

"Come into the barn," said Amy. "I don't know whether I ought to listen to you; but I don't want you to be" —

"Licked," said the girl, supplying the obnoxious word, and leaping the fence like a squirrel.

"A lickin' from old marm is no joke, I can tell you. Oh, dear! how I wish I could get away from her!"

"And why can't you?" asked Amy, her sympathy thoroughly aroused.

"I don't know how."

"I wish I could help you. Is that what you wanted to tell me?"

Just then came a blaze of lightning, and a roar of thunder like artillery. The girls pulled the barn-door to with difficulty; for the wind had risen, and the rain came down with sudden speed. The lamb began bleating with terror; and the only light there was came from a dusty, cobwebby window far up among the rafters.

"Aren't you afraid now?" asked Amy.

"Not much."

"I am a little. I think there is something so awful in these great crashes: you know some people think it is the voice of God."

"Do they? I didn't know that."

"If it is, then God must be very angry," said Amy, as another deafening peal reverberated among the mountains; and she drew nearer to her companion.

"*You* needn't mind if he is," said the girl re-assuringly, and laying a hand gently on Amy's arm: "*I* am the wicked one."

"We'd all have to mind," said Amy, "if that were true ; but I don't believe it."

"What?"

"That you are so very wicked, or God is so very angry. He sends thunder and lightning to make the air pure. But then, you know, one might be killed; and that is what makes me afraid."

"Yes: I suppose everybody is afraid to die."

"They oughtn't to be. If every one just tried to be good, they wouldn't worry about dying; but that is what is the matter,— we don't want to be good, and we don't want to die."

"I do, sometimes," said the gypsy girl, in the low tone her voice had a trick of falling into.

"Oh, no! you can't mean it. Are they so unkind to you?"

"Yes, they are; and then I hate them all."

"That, certainly, is very wicked."

"Well, I told you I was wicked."

"But you mustn't be," said Amy earnestly, imploringly. She had taken the lamb in her

arms, and was sitting on the hay, the gypsy girl beside her. The rain was pouring, the boughs of the trees creaking against the side of the barn; and only the fitful flashes of lightning illumined the gloom. A little shiver of fear, that did not come from the storm, ran through Amy's frame, as the wild glances of those bright black eyes met hers.

"Come, tell me, now, what was it you wanted to say to me? for, as soon as the rain stops, I must run to the hotel."

"Will you promise not to get me into trouble?" asked the girl.

"Certainly. How should I get you into trouble?"

"You might, if you told on me."

"I won't promise to have any secret from Mrs. Emmet."

"Then, I've no more to say;" and the girl sprang to her feet, and went to the door with a rapid step.

It was still pouring; and she hesitated to plunge into the rain.

"Come back," cried Amy: "if what you

want is any thing I can do for you, Mrs. Emmet is just the one to help us both."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am; but she has gone to New York, so perhaps you had better wait."

The girl looked disappointed, as she said, —

"We may go away from here any time, — to-night even. And there comes a man! Oh, please come up the mountain this evening! you'll be sorry if you don't. You know the path. It won't rain much longer. I'll be near that big pine-tree with names cut all over it. Promise you'll come, — quick!"

"I will," said Amy; and, as the words left her lips, the girl dashed out into the rain, and was gone.





CHAPTER XV.

AMY'S INTERVIEW.

AMY sat as if spell-bound. The girl had fascinated her. There was something so odd and wild about her, and something, too, that made her so sorry for her. She wished that she had asked her more about herself and the strange people she was with. The idea of a girl as big as she not knowing how to read and write, seemed dreadful. And then that awful old woman who whipped her—what could be worse! She stroked her lamb, and almost cried for pity. But the storm had now ceased: the wind had died down, with the sudden meekness that it shows after an angry gust of ill-behavior; and the sun was shining on the dripping leaves. She put the lamb in his

place again, where he could nip the sweet, wet clover, and went back to the hotel, to find Diademina darning stockings, the sitting-room in order, her trunk neatly filled. She answered Di's questions in a little mist of wonder, remembering her promise to the gypsy girl, and took one of her favorite books to her own cosey little corner; but she could not read. Then she dabbled a while with her water-colors; but her hand was unsteady, and she gave that up.

"Honey, what's de matter?" said the good-natured old serving-woman, answering her own question as soon as put. "De storm's upset ye, but it's all clar now. Sha'n't I get yo tea? it would be so lonely fur ye ter go down ter dat big table full o' people, and yo all alone."

"Thank you, Di: I wish you would," said Amy, longing to tell Di all that had happened, feeling confused as to what-was her duty, and wondering if her promise bound her to entire silence.

The tray came up with all manner of nice things upon it; and, as Amy dipped into

them, she pondered more and more. Would it be right to meet that girl all alone in the woods, as she had said she would do? Yes, she thought, on the whole, it would; for perhaps it was only cowardice which prompted the hesitation: but Mrs. Emmet might not like it if she went without telling any one, and to displease Mrs. Emmet was the last thing she would like to do. So, carefully putting some cakes and biscuit in a paper, she said, somewhat mysteriously, to Di, —

“Di, I am going to take these things to a poor girl.”

“Are ye, honey? dat’s nice.”

“Yes,” said Amy, moved with compassion, yet still not wanting to reveal too much. “The girl is as old as I am, yet she can’t read or write; and she has a very cruel old grandmother; at least, I suppose she is her grandmother, though I don’t know her name.”

“An’ where bouts does dese people lib?” asked Di, a little too curiously, Amy thought.

“Oh! they have no settled home: they wander about.”

"Gypsies, I suppose," said Di, in the coolest manner.

Amy looked up in amazement.

"I didn't say so, Di."

"No, chile, I knows you didn't, but I kinder suspected it: mos' folks what ain't gypsies hab homes to lib in, an' doan't wan-ner round."

Amy made no remark, and the old servant continued, —

"Dey ain't nice folks, honey; an' I wouldn't hab nuffin to do wid 'em, ef I wuz yo."

"But, Di, how can we do people good, if we don't have any thing to do with them?" asked Amy.

"Sho enuff, honey; but den, we ain't all called to do good."

"O Di! yes, we are," said Amy indignantly.

"Wal, in one sense we is, but not in anudder. Now, yo knows, ef you hab too much carryin'-on wid dese yer gypsy folk, yo'd be de wuss, an' dey'd be no better."

"How do you know?"

"I know *což* I know," said Di emphatically, ending the argument, and going out with the tray.

"I have made a promise, and I mean to keep it," said Amy to herself, slipping down the stairs after Diademma was out of sight. "I shall tell Mrs. Emmet all about it, and I do not think she will be angry: the girl said I would be sorry if I did not come, and perhaps it may be something very important that Mrs. Emmet would like to know."

Thus soliloquizing, she went to put her little pet to bed; and it was an easy matter then to turn down the lane, slip into the woods, and find the path which led up to the mountain.

The rain had cooled the air, and freshened every herb which lent its sweetness: the soft color of the sky was fading, though it was not yet dark; and, as Amy pushed aside the young saplings, they sprinkled her with moisture. Sleepy birds were piping softly, frogs croaked from the river-side, fire-flies began to burn; and a pale young moon waited for Night to light her silver censer.

Amy had a brave heart, and liked an adventure; but as she mounted higher and higher, and the sound of voices ceased, and the stillness of the forest surrounded her, the remembrance of those rough, rude gypsy people, and the way they had treated her, came back with force. What if this should be a trap to catch her! The thought took away her breath. As she paused, she thought she heard footsteps; and, turning hastily, she was sure something darted behind a tree,—a shadow perhaps, or a squirrel. Fear, for a moment, made her weak; then, summoning more courageous thoughts, she resolved not to doubt her poor friend, the girl, whose ignorance and misery appealed to her sympathy. She pressed on. It was getting dusky in the woods now, for the trees nearly met overhead: the pine-needles made the path slippery, and again she thought she heard pursuing steps. But she was now thoroughly determined that these tremors should not overcome her. What sort of harm could any one do her if she gave no offence? Many a story had she read of chil-

dren on the Western prairies encountering dangers that were not possible in the Eastern States, — fire and flood and wolves, — all for some simple kindness they were able to bestow. She was sure there were no wild beasts, for it had been some years since deer or bears had been hunted in these forests. Occasionally an eagle had been seen perched on some far-off crag, but eagles never flew at night-time. Perhaps the rustling of the leaves or the cracking of a twig might be caused by a rabbit or squirrel, possibly a fox or woodchuck. And then her thoughts recurred to her favorite historical character, Joan-of-Arc; how brave and noble she was, and how many lonely vigils she kept when she was a maiden on her father's farm! how beautiful her visions must have been, and how strangely on the silence must have come those voices she heard calling her!

Just then and there came softly but clearly, —

“Amy — Amy Travers.”

“Why, how did you know my name?” she exclaimed, more surprised at this familiarity

than at the presence of the gypsy girl; for she had reached the big pine-tree which was disfigured by initials cut in its bark.

"It is my business to know people's names: old marm makes me find them out; and 'cause I can't remember 'em all, nor write 'em down, she wallops me."

"How dreadful!" said Amy.

"You may well say so," said the girl: "and it is just to spite her I've come to-night. You see, if she knows the names of folks, it astonishes 'em so that they think she must know more; and that's the way she gets heaps of news out of 'em, while they don't think they have told her any thing: that's the way she tells fortunes. She *really* don't know any more than anybody else: she only pretends."

"Is that so?" said Amy.

"Of course it is. You don't mean to say you believed in fortune-telling?"

"I never thought much about it."

"Well, it is a great humbug."

"I should think so; but oh! I am so sorry for you, and I do wish I could help

you in some way ! for you seem so unhappy. I have been wondering why you live with people who are so unkind to you. Can't you get away ? Must you stay with them ? ”

Amy had quite forgotten every thing but her own pity for the girl, who seemed much touched by this evidence of it. She pulled the ragged shawl down over her eyes, and Amy was sure she heard a sob. Putting her hand gently on the girl's shoulder, she said, —

“ Don't cry. I am sure Mrs. Emmet would help you, she is so kind to me. Tell me how you came to be a gypsy, please, or if you are really one.”

The girl tried to suppress her feelings.

“ I can't tell you. I haven't time now. When they are not cross with me, I like to tramp about in the woods and fields. I can walk miles and miles ; and I can ride the horses bare-back, and climb a tree like a squirrel : but it's 'cause they're so cross that I hate 'em.”

“ Oh ! ” said Amy, unused to such violent language. The girl felt her shrink from her.

"You'd hate 'em, too, if they beat you, an' called you names."

"Perhaps," said Amy; "but that doesn't make it right."

"No more is it right for them to hit me."

"No, to be sure not: that is why I should like to keep you. But I forgot: what is it you have to tell me? I can't stay long; for, though the moon is bright, the trees are so thick that the path is dark."

The girl looked from side to side, and even peered about among the bushes, saying as she did so, —

"Somebody may be looking and listening, and I don't want to be caught."

Amy could not help comparing her to some wild creature of the woods, her movements were so swift and yet so wary. After assuring herself that no one was near, she sat down on a moss-covered rock, and motioned Amy to sit beside her.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE MISSING CHILD.

STORY-TELLING is like the weaving of a braid,—first we pick up one strand, then another, and so on till the end is reached: therefore, I must carry my young readers to the point where Belle Travers was standing, in the midst of a street rabble,—the centre of observation as the sister of a boy who was fighting another boy,—heart-sick, weary, frightened, and forlorn. Was it any wonder that she should have turned towards the first person whose face she had ever seen before? And was it any wonder that this person, being none other than a man who had entered her father's house surreptitiously the night before, should not have wished to be recognized? Pushing through

the yelling, hooting mob of urchins who gather so easily at every part of the city, Belle had touched this man on the arm, and said, —

“Please take me home.”

“Oh, yes!” answered the man gruffly: “I’ll take you home, of course. How did you know me?”

“By this,” said Belle, pointing to a peculiar scar on his face.

“Humph!” said the man gloomily.

Poor Belle here slipped on a banana-skin, and fell, with one foot doubled under her. As she strove to rise, the pain was so great that she could not; and, though the man helped her, all she could do was to hobble along. Just as the man was about to put her in a street-car, she recollected that she had left Vincent to the fury of his adversaries: she begged the man to wait, but he seemed quite indifferent. The crowd pressed around, and a woman joined the man. They whispered together for a few moments, and then each taking her by the arm, hurried her off without listening to a word she said.

On and on they went, till they came to one of those high, narrow houses where poor people are packed, where misery seeks misery; and here they halted for another whispered confab.

And now I must explain that this man was no acquaintance of Ann's, nor was he a confirmed thief. He had been tempted by the open door the evening previous, and would undoubtedly have helped herself to any thing he might have found: but he was not used to doing daring deeds of violence; he had taken up bad ways in idleness, and by influence of evil associates. This made him timid and irresolute. He had been surprised at Isabella's recognition, and considerably annoyed; but he would have put her in the way of going home had he not met this woman, who saw in the situation a means of getting money by the reward that would be offered if Belle should be missing: and so he suddenly turned on his heel after the long whispering was over, and Belle saw him no more. The little spurt of generosity he had been capable of had given out, and

now the child was in different hands. Belle's spirit of self-reliance did not forsake her. The pain of her sprained ankle was too absorbing to let other fears assail her; and, making a great effort to control herself, she hobbled up the stairs. But the effort had been too great, and she became unconscious. When she awoke from her swoon, she found herself lying on a bed, her head being bathed, and her ankle bound up. Her thoughts were in a dizzy whirl; but she managed to ask where she was, and why they did not take her home? To which the answer was given that she was too sick to move, and that she should be taken home as soon as convenient. This quieted her, and she was better able to notice her surroundings.

She was in a small room with one window, out of which she saw roof upon roof, tall chimneys, and a bit of blue sky. The room was whitewashed, and had a chair in it, but no other furniture. A tin basin stood upon the chair. On the bed was a patchwork quilt which looked passably clean. Through

the open door, Belle could see a family living-room, with a cooking-stove, table, tubs, dresser, and chairs. In one corner was a sewing-machine, with a pile of coarse fabric beside it; and before this sat a woman working. She was rather young: her hair was neatly arranged, but her dress was poor and faded, and her face was pale. Beside her, and upon the heap of work, was seated a baby, not old enough to walk, though it sat upright, and grasped a plaything. The woman who had brought Belle to this place, and had answered her questions, seemed to be talking in the sign-language to the younger woman; for she made many motions, and there was no word uttered between them. Then the first woman departed, and the younger one resumed stitching. Belle was not sorry to see the elder woman go, she was so disagreeable looking. She was a big creature, with purplish cheeks and heavy brow, just such an one as a cook Belle remembered her mother having to discharge for her bad habits.

After watching the woman's steady tread

of the sewing-machine, and the continual turning off of the rough garments, and wondering if she never would stop, Belle tried to find something else that would interest her; but the heat was great, and she fell asleep. Wearied with all her novel experiences, her pain, and her anxious thoughts, she slept heavily and many hours; for, when she awoke, the early dawn had but just begun to tinge the sky; and she gazed about, not knowing where she was, or what had happened. Slowly, gradually it all came back to her. Where was Vincent? What had nurse and Ann thought of their absence? How was she to get home? Thought after thought surged upon her. She sat up, and rubbed her sleepy eyes; but her ankle was so stiff and swollen that she could not move it without pain. Through the door she saw the same young woman stirring something in a sauce-pan, the baby was crying lustily from some corner she could not see, and a man was eating at the table: his face was not towards her; and, in another moment, he picked up a tin dinner-can, and

went out. Belle called the woman to come to her, but there was no response ; and now she remembered the actions of the day before, and came to the conclusion that the woman must be deaf and dumb. If so, what should she do ? how make her wants known ? Crawling out of bed on her hands and knees, dragging her painful foot after her, she entered the other apartment. The screaming baby saw her, and stopped in amazement ; and the woman, attracted, probably, by the child's movements, turned, and discovered her. She smiled in a pleasant way, and her poor, pale face looked almost pretty ; but she said not a word, only pointed to Belle's foot, shook her head doubtfully, and pointed to the bed, as if she had better go back to it. But Belle was not disposed to obey. She threw herself by the baby, and took its little hands in hers. They were clean, and so were its little bare, pink feet. The mother nodded her approbation at these friendly overtures, but signified her wish to have Belle keep her foot still by placing the baby on the bed, and leading Belle to it, where

she soon brought water, and helped her bathe. Then she placed a bowl of oatmeal-porridge before her, and Belle's long fast was speedily broken.

Refreshed and rested, Belle's mind became clearer and stronger in its action. She saw that, for the present, there was nothing to fear but an irksome confinement, and that might end at any moment; for, of course, means would be taken to discover her whereabouts: so she set herself resolutely to make the best of the situation.

It was the same warm day that Vincent was spending also in confinement, but how differently! The same hot sun poured down on the two houses; but where Vincent lay, the walls were thicker, and the air purer. All day long the poor, mute woman toiled at her sewing-machine, stopping only long enough to feed her baby, serve Isabella, or drink a cup of water. The fire in the stove was allowed to go out, or the atmosphere would have been still more stifling. The baby was Belle's sole resource: in his one small garment, he seemed fairly

comfortable; and the mother's face brightened every time she looked at him. He crowed and capered, and responded to all Belle's efforts to please him; and the day, though a long and tedious one, was less dreary than it would have been without his little presence; but as evening drew near, and no word from home came to her, and the woman's husband returned, tired, sullen, and dirty, Belle's fears again asserted themselves.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNT.

MRS. EMMET had gone to New York on an errand of merey, — to help the good sister of one of the charitable societies to which she belonged, in gathering together the waifs and strays for their yearly breath of fresh air. In accordance with her promise to Amy, she had found a substitute for the active work, and had contented herself with placing funds at Sister Mary's disposal, in order that she might return to Amy, and complete her satisfaction by making the acquaintance of her mother and aunt, which she was the more desirous of doing because of her future plans for Amy. She had become very much attached to the child, and felt that she could not readily part with her ;

but, before communicating what she chose to consider her selfish wishes, she wanted to assure herself concerning Amy's home relations, and how they were likely to be affected by a prolonged absence.

She had therefore denied herself the pleasure of seeing the happiness of the poor little creatures who were to be refreshed and strengthened by her bounty, and was making some necessary purchases, when, amid the street-throng of even this warm summer day, she espied a familiar face.

"Ah, Miss Gaylord!" was her pleasant salutation, "do the pleasures of shopping outweigh the delights of the sea-shore, or have you exhausted Burton Beach?"

Even as she spoke, she noticed a change in Miss Gaylord, — so great a one that she involuntarily glanced at her dress to see if she was in mourning, and instantly added, "I beg pardon. You are agitated. Something has happened."

"Oh! have you not heard?" was Miss Gaylord's almost reproachful reply.

"No, nothing. But come with me: we

must find a quiet corner," and, with the ready sympathy which was always so quick to show itself, Mrs. Emmet drew Miss Gaylord towards a place less crowded than the one they were in.

"Of course you know of my brother-in-law's failure," said Miss Gaylord.

"I heard something of that," said Mrs. Emmet; "but, in these days of rapid commercial changes, I thought that it might be but a temporary embarrassment. Your brother-in-law has always borne a good name, and still does so; surely"—

"Oh, thank you!" said Miss Gaylord hastily: "no, that is not the worst trouble, though that is bad enough; but it is the children. Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word."

"Not about Belle's being lost?" Then Miss Gaylord poured out the story, with bitter self-reproach, with much detail, and with a hopeless sort of sorrow.

Mrs. Emmet listened attentively, heard all that had been done, asked for a repetition of every detail, and made many in-

quiries, then suddenly reverted again to her companion's appearance.

"Where are you going now, my dear?" she asked.

"To the telegraph office. I thought best to use every effort here, before sending word to my sister. I may have been wrong, and Belle may be suffering by the delay; but I could not bear to add to their troubles one moment sooner than necessary: now it seems unavoidable."

"Come with me first. You were quite right, very thoughtful and considerate. But let me help you now: you are worn and wearied." She thought she had never seen a young face so changed, and yet not wholly for the worse: the grief and anxiety had made traces, but there was a sweeter expression in its gravity than in its gayety. While she spoke she hailed a cab, and urged Miss Gaylord to enter. Then she ordered the man to her own home. As they drove, she again listened to the story, saying, "Poor little things!—little babes in the wood. They really were in earnest. It is too bad

their little scheme ended so sadly; and to think of their courage and determination! But we must not despair: a girl of so much spirit as Belle has shown will not have been utterly cast down. Nothing is improbable in a great city like this, and nothing" — she paused, overcome by sudden dark doubts and fears. What, indeed, might not be possible?

They had now reached her house, — one that Miss Gaylord well knew for its external beauty. The great door opened noiselessly, and the tiled hall was dark and cool and fragrant: a bowl of flowers stood on the hall-table. *Portières* of Indian matting hung at the entrances to the rooms, which, with their hard-wood floors and muslin draperies, were in their coolest summer dress.

Mrs. Emmet led the way to her morning-room on the second floor, which seemed to combine all that was useful and beautiful. There were books and busts; a library table, with its shaded lamp, and olive-wood appointments for writing; sketches and photographs; souvenirs of travel; a basket with

its pieces of embroidery ready for an unoccupied moment; wicker-work easy-chairs, with their satin ribbons and plush cushions and dainty lace covers; and, again, flowers in quaint bronze cups and porcelain bowls. No sound of the city's din came to this quiet retreat; and the slippered servant made no noise as he brought *carafes* of water, and fruit, and a silver tankard of iced lemonade.

"This seems like an earthly paradise, Mrs. Emmet, after all the dreadful places I have been to lately," said tired Clara Gaylord.

"I dare say, my dear: those police-stations are terribly depressing. You must take a good long rest: lie here upon the lounge while I write some letters, and make some preparations to stay and help you;" and she drew off Miss Gaylord's hat, and began to wave a snowy fan of ostrich plumes before the girl's tired, heated face.

"My hat feels as if it were part of my head, it has been on it so long. But you must not trouble yourself this way, Mrs. Emmet: I have no right to throw this burden upon you."

“But I have the right to assume it, my dear. Not only is it a right, but a pleasure, a duty.”

“You are a good Samaritan indeed. And how does Amy get on, Mrs. Emmet? Is she a good child?”

“Very. She has a sweet nature. I am very fond of her. I must write to her now, to explain my absence, or” — and she stopped a moment to think, “perhaps I had better send a telegram. I have been away only one night, but I promised to return to-day; and, though Jack and Di are used to my erratic movements, Amy is not, and may be impatient for my return.” So saying, she wrote a few words, touched a silver bell, and charged the seryant to deliver her message immediately; then, turning to Miss Gaylord, she said, —

“Now tell me just how long it is since you had that despatch from Easton?”

“I think it is three days ago, it may be only two: it seems an age. It relieved me so much that for a whole day I quite ignored the dreadful fear that it might not come to

any thing; and, when it was proved false, I was perfectly stunned. I could do nothing. Everybody, you know, is out of town, at least, all our friends are; and I had tired out Dennis O'Brien and Ann and nurse, and poor Vincent could only sigh, and stand at the windows, and walk wearily around the block. And the little girls half crazed me with their dreary little questions, and I didn't want to speak to anybody who might let the thing get into the papers; and so, as a *dernier ressort*, I was going to send word to my sister. But, O Mrs. Emmet, if I only had not gone away! if I only had not been persuaded to make that visit! Perhaps if I had staid with the children, this would not have happened."

Tears were streaming down Miss Gaylord's face as she looked with an appealing glance at Mrs. Emmet. Her remorse was too evident for her friend to add to it, though she did not, indeed, free her from blame.

"My dear, all events are in the control of One wiser than we. If you have erred, you have certainly suffered enough for it in my

human estimation, and need reproach yourself no more; for you have done all you can now to retrieve the result of this childish adventure. The one task before us now is to recover Isabella, and we must set ourselves bravely to do it: at least, *I* must, for you are too tired just now to command the requisite coolness and calmness. And probably money is needed: the police move quicker with that little prod behind them."

She smiled as she spoke, and checked Miss Gaylord's quick demurrer with a little caressing movement, re-arranging the pillows of the lounge, and forcing her young friend to recline. Then she darkened the room still more, and softly waved the fan of ostrich plumes until the tired eyelids dropped, and sleep, the sweet restorer, came to soothe and still the anxious thoughts.

Opening her portfolio, Mrs. Emmet drew out her paper, and sought a corner where there was a gleam of afternoon sunshine. Here she wrote and wrote until two hours had passed, when the servant appeared with a letter. As she took it from the salver, she

saw its character with the little flutter that an unexpected telegram always conveys. Tearing it quickly open, she read these words:—

Cousin Belle is lost. Please tell Miss Gaylord I know where she is.

(Signed)

AMY.

It required all her self-control not to waken her sleeping friend, and reveal this joyful news; but the how, when, and where of Amy's connection with this affair she could not master. The more she thought, the less able was she to solve it, unless some message had been sent to her in her absence; and this was Amy's way of putting it. She bit her lips to keep them closed as she watched Miss Gaylord's softly heaving chest, and noted her deep slumber. At last there came a little tremor of the drooping lids, a little sigh, and Miss Gaylord, with a start of sudden and painful consciousness, awoke.

"My dear," said Mrs. Emmet, taking her hand in hers, "while you slept, fairies have been at work; and see what they have

brought us," and she held up the yellow paper.

Miss Gaylord seized it eagerly.

"Do you believe it?" she asked.

"I see no reason to doubt it."

"But why does she not say where we can find her? O Mrs. Emmet! no time must be lost, — not another night."

"Nor shall it be, if I can help it. You forget that neither Amy nor I knew any thing of this till to-day. The child probably feels assured that her cousin is safe, and has sent this only to relieve your anxiety. See, I have written this message; though I think I had better take the evening train, and leave the answer for you to act upon: and yet I do not like to leave you. My fear is, that Amy may, in her childish zeal, make some mistake which would retard Belle's recovery."

Miss Gaylord read the message, which was simply a demand for particulars, and returned it to Mrs. Emmet, saying, —

"Whatever you do will be for the best."

"Then, I will send this, wait for an answer, and take a later train if necessary."

The despatch was sent, and dinner ordered. A note also was written to Vincent, explaining Miss Gaylord's detention, and the hope that now something would soon be accomplished.

While the ladies were dining, the return message came. It ran thus:—

Try 591 Avenue A, fifth floor, rear.

(Signed)

AMY.

JACK.

DIADEMMA.

Mrs. Emmet laughed as she pushed aside the luscious fruits before her.

“Amy believes in the words of the Psalmist, ‘In the multitude of counsellors is wisdom.’ But we haven’t even so much as one name to guide us in our inquiries: however, the carriage is at the door; now for Avenue A before dark. Thomas had better follow with a policeman;” and, giving further explicit directions to her man-servant, Mrs. Emmet and Miss Gaylord departed.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET TOLD.

IT was no wonder that Mrs. Emmet could not understand how Amy had received intelligence of Belle's misfortune. It had come in a way she did not imagine.

Seated on a moss-covered rock in the woods, the soft breeze sighing in the tree-tops, and the darkness of evening making a mystery of every leafy nook, Amy felt a little thrill of feeling at the interview with the gypsy, which was partly due to the time, and partly to her strange companion, who, with her shawl over her head, and her head poised as if listening, and her dark eyes bent on Amy, said, —

“As soon as I heard your name was Traversers, — and I heard it when we ‘picked up’

your lamb, as well as lots of other news about the people in the hotel, — I made up my mind to tell you something I knew about a girl of the same name as yours, Belle Travers.”

“Why, that’s my cousin,” said Amy, turning around suddenly.

“Is she? Well, I thought she might be, but I didn’t know; and I didn’t care much, for I only wanted to spite ole marm,” said the girl in a way that was quite shocking to Amy, who gave a soft, little reproachful expression, which the girl laughed at, saying, —

“Oh! you don’t know ole marm; but I guess Belle Travers does, and wishes she never had seen her.”

“But how could she see her down at Burton Beach?” asked the astonished Amy.

“She could have, just as easy as nothing; for ole marm goes everywhere. But she didn’t: she saw her in New York.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” said the girl, almost holding her breath to listen, and starting at the quiver of some rustling leaves. “Oh, wouldn’t she kill me if she knew I was telling you this!”

"No, she wouldn't," said Amy boldly: "I wouldn't let her."

The gypsy girl laughed scornfully again.

"You don't begin to know her wickedness, nor the way she can torment. She's the wickedest, awfulest, — oh! there's no use in tryin' to say *how* wicked she is. But anyway, Belle Travers got lost in the street a few days ago, and ole marm took her to a place where she boards sometimes, and is keeping her there, in hopes there'll be a reward offered. And nobody else knows where she is, — no one who cares about her, I mean."

The girl told this in a hurried whisper that made Amy's blood run cold. She thought it could not be possible, certainly was not true; but none the less did it make her tremble.

"How — how do *you* know all this?" she asked.

"They thought I was asleep one night when they were talking about it, but I heard every word: I'm a light sleeper. I like to look up at the stars, and try to count 'em:

that makes me dizzy; but the man's face in the moon makes me laugh, and wish I could jump up there, and — why, what was that?"

The girl cowered with sudden fear, and Amy was tempted to fly; but remembering, that, if the girl's story was true, it would be necessary for her to know more, she conquered herself, and pulled the girl into a darker spot.

"Come here," she said. "Tell me over again, — tell me every thing. I can't believe it, it is so dreadful; and what can I do? Oh, poor Belle! How did it all happen? Are you sure it is true?"

"Yes, I am," said the gypsy girl sullenly. "Do you suppose I'd tell if it wasn't? If they find out that I *have* told, I'll have to leave, — I may have to anyhow. Oh, I'm so tired of being wicked!"

"You poor thing! You sha'n't be wicked any more. Mrs. Emmet will help you to be good, I know she will. Oh, if she were only here to tell us what to do!"

Again the girl cowered with fear, and again the bushes quivered and rustled; and

this time it was not the evening breeze which parted the leaves, but a dusky form that made the gypsy girl utter a dismal cry, and plunge forward, only to be caught and detained within the grasp of a pair of strong, stout arms.

With joyful recognition Amy saw that the person was Di, — good, faithful Di, who had followed her every footstep, and heard the whole of the gypsy girl's sad story.

A load was lifted from Amy's heart the moment she saw her.

"O Di!" she cried, "are you here? I am so glad."

"Are ye den, honey? I'd no idee o' dat: I'se tought yo' wus mighty anxious to be all alone, — but I couldn't 'low no such caryin's on wid dese yer gypsies. — I say, yo'," turning to the struggling girl, whose vain attempts to release herself had been almost frantic, "whatebber yo' do, doan't holler: it ud bring more people here dan yo' want. Jack's jist a little way off yander, an' I want ter know more about dis yer stuff. Ef it's true, we'd oughter let Mrs. Emmet know

all about it; ef it ain't true, yo's goin' to be punished, dat's all."

The girl now ceased struggling, and stood with head hanging, her whole attitude one of dejection.

"Di," said Amy breathlessly, "it *is* true, — I'm sure it is; and you must tell us what to do."

"How can I, chile? I'm puzzled myself nuff to know what to do wid dis yer gal: she's got in a bad fix. — Say," turning to the girl again, "didn't yo' know all yo' waggins wus on de road ag'in, an' yo' people movin'?"

"No, I didn't; but I'm glad, for I am afraid to look ole marm in the face again."

Di looked compassionately at her, then she said, —

"I'll hab to speak to Jack. But whar's de place dat dey hab got Miss Belle hidin'? We'se no better off now dan ef we didn't know nuffin'."

The girl let her shawl drop, fumbled in her pocket, and drew out a slip of dirty paper with an address on it. "I can't read it," she said; "but when we're in the city I

sometimes don't know where to find ole marm, and so she gave me this. I just show it to anybody, and they tell me where to go. It's a house where some of our people stay in the winter time. Some of them are nicer than others; and I think the Travers girl is perhaps with Mrs. Smith, a deaf and dumb woman, whose husband is a bricklayer. Ole marm laughed as she said 'no one could get any thing out of her if they tried forever.' But she didn't know I heard every word she spoke. It was an awful warm night, an' the skeeters wouldn't let me sleep if I had wanted to; and ole marm had been *so* ugly to me that day I was bound to pay her off, and I hope I've done it."

"Yo' mus'n't be revengeful," said Di: "dat's bein' as wicked as ole marm; no good comes o' dat, — onless," — and here she paused as if perplexed, but speedily began again, — "onless de Lord oberrules de wickedness to make it turn about so dat sinners see how bad dey are. Well, I'se mighty puzzled, I 'low, an' I must jist talk to Jack."

So saying, she turned down the path, keep-

ing a firm hold of the gypsy, and letting Amy follow.

The moon was now shining brightly; and, when they came to where Jack was standing, they could catch, through a rift in the forest, a glimpse of the road, where, with much clatter and jargon of voices, the gypsies were beginning their march.

"Won't they miss you? Won't they wonder where you are?" whispered Amy.

"I suppose so," said the girl. "But I've often been missing before: they don't really care where I am. They think I only want to bother them, and that I'll show myself before long."

"Oh, you poor thing!" said Amy. "You shall never go back, never: you shall come home with me, and be good and useful, and have nice clothes, and learn to read."

"I don't know," said the girl wistfully, and gazing after the retreating wagons: "if it wasn't for ole marm and the rainy spells and the cold weather, I'd like it. I do like it, you know, all but the lickin's, — they're dreadful; and now it would be worse than ever. I daren't go back."

"No, indeed," said Amy: "I couldn't bear to think of your being with them again."

"Couldn't you?" said the girl, with an astonished look.

"Of course not, after being so good as to tell us this about Belle."

"It wasn't goodness that made me," said the girl, with calm justice. "But it's kinder nice to have you care."

"I *do* care ever so much,—more than I can tell you. I want to do something for you; and I mean to, if you'll let me. You poor, deserted thing—there!" and, with a little sob, she caught up the girl's thin, brown hand, and kissed it. If any one had told her to do this, she could not have thought it possible; but the warm impulse of her young heart was to befriend the poor creature, and this was the almost unconscious way she showed it.

The girl looked at her hand as one might who has had a beautiful gem placed on a finger.

"That settles it," she said: "if you can care for me, I'll try to be good. No: I'll

never go back *now* ;” and she turned her gaze from the road as if she had turned also from the past.

“Here’s Jack,” said Di ; and in a few minutes the whole story had been retold, with many surprising embellishments of gesture and exclamation. Jack’s decision was soon given. Mrs. Emmet was to return on the morrow. They must wait for her guidance ; meanwhile, the girl should be cared for, which could be easily done in the servants’ quarters at the hotel.

When the morrow came, and brought Mrs. Emmet’s message, Amy had already sent the news about Belle, following it up with the address given by the gypsy. As she had held many consultations with Di and Jack, and had been guided by their advice, she had signed their names with her own, that Mrs. Emmet might know that their judgment had assisted her ; for, though they made no pretence of superior knowledge, both the colored people were old and trusted friends as well as servants of Mrs. Emmet.



CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND.

THE sorrows of children are thought of lightly. Few appreciate the depth of feeling in a young heart, and think —

“The tear down childhood’s cheek that flows,
Is like the dew-drop on the rose, —
When next the summer wind comes by,
And waves the bush, the flower is dry.”

That may be true of the infant, but not of a child ten or twelve years of age, whose reason and judgment are not ripe enough to come to the rescue of the feelings which are, perhaps, the more poignant because of their freshness.

What Belle Travers endured when the weary hours went by, and no word came from home, and her own helplessness became

more apparent to her, would be too painful to describe. She gave way to her grief in a manner that alarmed the poor deaf and dumb woman. She felt herself abandoned, forsaken, forgotten. She imagined that her brother Vincent might have been killed, and that her parents' grief was too great to even remember her. All sorts of wild conjectures made her poor little head and heart ache; and there was no "Silent Comforter" on the bare, whitewashed walls of the small room she was in, to speak peace to her soul. But the baby, with his staring blue eyes and chubby cheeks, did what he could: he crept up to her, and cooed and gurgled in notes as soft as those of the wood-dove, putting his little hands on her tear-stained cheeks, and his bare feet wherever he could find room for them. He was a pretty baby, and had learned the lesson of patience, which the children of the poor acquire so early. He was used to being left to himself, and finding pleasure in any object which happened to be near, whether it was a wooden spoon and tin pail, or the flies which crawled over his bald

head, and tickled him. Because it frightened him, and made his blue eyes fill with tears, Belle quieted her sobs ; and because it pleased him, she strove to smile : and the effort made her forget herself. She conquered her aversion to speak to the cross, tired husband of the poor sewing-woman, and asked him why she was not taken home ; but he had answered so gruffly and mysteriously that she did not dare go farther, especially as he vented his annoyance on his wife, and made her cry.

Belle was as lost to all sense of time as a shipwrecked mariner. She knew the hot sun had risen and set a number of times : that indicated days, but seemed years. She knew that she had swallowed, or tried to swallow, the food put before her, and was better able to drag herself from the bed. But she did not dare yet attempt an escape, though this was now her constant thought ; and for the fiftieth time she had leaned far out of the window to count the many stories beneath, and guess the distance from the street. She was doing this now, — as well

as she could for the fluttering garments on the lines suspended from one of those great mast-like poles which carry the cordage and sails of those freighted hulks we call tenements, — when she noticed a commotion in the court below. A stringed band had been playing a lively tune, and dozens of heads were thrust, listening, from the windows; but the band had stopped, and the circle of dancing children had ceased, to gaze open-mouthed at a group of people of very different appearance from the inhabitants of the place. One was an elderly woman of dignified aspect, the others a younger lady, and a man in livery, followed by two policemen. Isabelle's look of indifference changed to one of astonishment, and then to quick recognition. With one piercing cry, she screamed, "Aunt Clara, here I am!" and then turned, to find herself forced by no gentle hand into a closet. It was the dumb woman's husband, who had just come in; and, with a terrible sinking of the heart, Isabelle heard him wondering with an oath where the key was. But before her fears could shape them-

selves, before the mute creature could respond to her angry husband's demand, made known by some fierce gesture, the room was entered by the party from below, and Isabelle heard her aunt Clara say, "This must be the room, Mrs. Emmet." A short altercation followed. The man had placed himself against the closet-door, and Belle could not budge it. She strove with all her might. She strove, too, to scream; but her voice would not rise. It seemed as if she were suffocating; when, with an authoritative, "Stand aside there!" the door was flung open, and she fell forward.

It was a moment of confusion and disorder. Belle could not stand without pain, and her aunt Clara had taken her in her arms. The policemen were debating whom to put under arrest, as the man asserted that he was ignorant of the means used to detain Belle, and had only received her as a lodger; though the forcing her in a closet was so much against him. The dumb woman was weeping, and, with the child in her arms, made vehement though silent protestations, and implored

mercy for her husband. Mrs. Emmet seemed to weigh the situation judicially, then said to Belle, —

“Tell us exactly what has happened, and then we shall know how to act.”

Belle's excitement made her voice tremulous; but she managed to make out a clear story, leaning on her aunt Clara, and holding both her hands as if there were some possibility of losing her.

“I was brought here,” she said, after rehearsing all her previous doings, “by an old-looking woman with purplish cheeks and black eyes. I thought I heard her called ‘Marm’ something, but I am not sure what.” Mrs. Emmet nodded to the policemen as if a sudden clew had come to the mystery; then, turning to Clara, she said, —

“I begin to see how Amy is connected with this. She must have heard something through the gypsies who stole her lamb. They have an old woman among them whom they call ‘Marm Blake.’ I have not told you about our visit to their camp, and now I recall something else. While we were

there, the strange actions of a girl attracted Amy very much. We spoke of it at the time. It must have been through her that she has gained this information."

"Do you know this gypsy woman?" asked one of the policemen of the man whom he had under arrest.

"Will you let me off if I tell," responded the man.

"That's as the judge orders. You'd better do what you can to save yourself."

"Well, I do know her, and she brought the gal here. My wife can't ax any questions if she wanted to, and she took the gal to board. I've had nuthin' to do with it."

"All right. Just you come along with us; and, if you're not to blame, you'll not stay long."

With this, there was a general movement towards the door.

Belle begged her aunt to give the poor deaf-and-dumb woman some money, kissed the baby, and went with her friends to where the carriage was waiting.

It will not be necessary to enter into the

details of the judicial examination and its result. It is enough that the woman, 'Marm Blake,' who was as well known in the city as in the country, was found, prosecuted, and punished.

It is pleasanter to turn to the joyful meeting of Vincent and Isabella, the delight of Tillie and Clara, the warm congratulations of Ann and nurse and Dennis O'Brien, the long letters and short despatches sent by Mrs. Emmet and Clara Gaylord that evening, and the ice-cream and cake and flowers which Mrs. Emmet summoned, as if by magic, from the nearest confectioner.

Belle's chair was a throne, and all the others her willing subjects. Again and again was her story told, with many interruptions, many expressions of pity, and ejaculations of surprise. The women wept when she told of the deaf-and-dumb woman sewing, sewing, all the long, hot days; and Clara and Tillie longed for the baby to play with. Then the lame ankle had to be bathed, and swathed in cool, soft linen; and the climax of happiness was reached when Mrs. Emmet hinted at

some great pleasure in which they all were to share. Something so utterly enchanting that it could not even be spoken of until everybody had slept, and rested for several days, and letters could go and come from Chicago.

What could it be? And why did aunt Clara and Mrs. Emmet say so much about Amy?

And then they began to understand that it was through Amy, their little country cousin, that Belle had been recovered.

“Through Amy, way off in Delaware or Pennsylvania, or somewhere that you have never been!” said Tillie to Vincent; and Vincent had looked at Belle, and said, —

“What do you think about it, Belle?” and Belle had replied, in a very weary voice, —

“I hope she has forgiven me.”





CHAPTER XX.

AMY'S HOME.

UNDER an elm-tree which shaded one corner of a large, old-fashioned garden, sweet with the breath of pinks and geraniums, and bright with roses, larkspur, cockscombs, and hollyhocks which bordered the straight alleys leading to this corner, was a rustic bench and table. On the bench were seated two ladies knitting; beside them was a collie, — a brown-and-white sheep-dog; and coming down the garden-path towards them, with his hands behind him, was a man of about fifty years, whose bright eyes, pleasant smile, and ruddy color might have enabled him to pass for a boy, had not his figure, and hair just tinged with gray, contradicted such a supposition. As he approached the ladies,

the younger one rose, as did also the collie, stretching itself lazily, but wagging its tail vigorously. The older lady looked up from her knitting to say cheerily, —

“Well, what news from Amy?” and the younger one put out her hand for the letters which she suspected were hidden behind that ample figure.

There was certainly an air of expectation on all these kindly, pleasant faces. Looking up the garden-path to the low, broad piazza of the house, overhung with clematis and wisteria, one might also fancy the house itself in a state of expectancy. The windows wore a smiling brightness; and, peering within, might have been seen fresh flowers in the jugs and vases, neatness and order in all the simple rooms, and a table set with snowy linen, clearest glass, and quaint china.

“What news?” echoed the lower-toned voice. “News, indeed! Queer news, — news of all sorts and sizes; but I don’t think I had better let you know any of it. What will you have left to talk about when

Amy comes? Now, Kitty, be still," this to the young lady, who was peeping over his shoulder at the package of papers and letters, and striving to pluck them from his grasp.

"Thomas, you *are* tantalizing," said the wife. "Tell us how soon Amy will be here, and let me read those letters for myself. That dear Mrs. Emmet must be as lovely as every one says. I thought Amy might have exaggerated a little; but Vincent's wife writes me that her sister, Clara Gaylord, thinks there is no one quite so kind. She has been an angel of mercy to those poor, dear children in the city. But I am afraid our simple ways may not suit her."

"Don't you believe that, Martha," said her sister. "Our Amy would never have been so happy with her if she were one who fumes and fusses, and cannot live without grandeur. I am sure she will be just as much at home with us as if she were one of us; and already I am prepared to hear her admire our dear old house, the garden, the lake, and every nook that we love."

"Are you?" said Mrs. Travers, just a

little anxiously. "Well, it is the better way; but I am so unused to strangers."

"You must not call her a stranger, after all her kindness to our Amy," protested Mr. Travers. "And now read this long, long letter that Amy has toiled over, and see if my promise of news is not verified. There," and he placed his package on the table, sat down, and watched, with smiling countenance, the expressions of surprise, interest, and absorbed attention which the ladies gave to Amy's letter.

"This is a romance, to be sure," said Kitty gleefully, as she finished.

"Thomas, I told you we should have sent for, or gone for, your brother Vincent's children as soon as we heard of his misfortune," said Mrs. Travers reproachfully. "I shall never forgive myself: we might have saved them all this anxiety;" and she wiped her eyes, and looked so sorrowfully at her husband that even a little moisture twinkled on his eyelids; but he coughed a little impatient cough, and said quickly, "Martha, you know I was haying, and could not leave, and that

I thought the children were in Clara Gaylord's care, until Amy wrote to the contrary : and you know, too, that my brother Vincent is used to managing his own affairs without help from me ; but he's got to have it now, whether he wants it or not. I stopped at Johnson's to see about the cottage, and when Mrs. Emmet comes" — He was stopped by a series of quick little barks from the collie, as wagon-wheels were heard crunching on the gravel ; and Amy's voice called out, —

"Mother, father, aunt Kitty ! Oh, how lovely you all look !" and out bounced Amy from the carriage, jumping into her mother's arms, and followed by Mrs. Emmet in more leisurely fashion.

"Down, Prince ! down, sir !" she cried, for the dog was leaping to lick her face. "Oh, dear !" she added, "I have got to introduce everybody."

"No, you haven't," said Mrs. Emmet cordially. And "No, indeed," came simultaneously from all, as each pressed forward to offer courtesies. But Amy tried to do her best.

"This is my mother, and this aunt Kitty," she said.

"And who is this?" asked her father, as another girl, taller than Amy, appeared, — a tall, thin, dark-eyed, and sad-faced girl in a neat suit of brown, with a straw hat to match.

"This is Hagar," she said, adding in a whisper, "my gypsy friend."

"I am glad to see you, Hagar," said Mr. Travers in his merry, kindly way, pushing the suspicious dog aside, and taking the girl by the hand.

"We knew you would be, Mr. Travers," said Mrs. Emmet; "and, as I have had to send Di and Jack to the city (and of course you know who *they* are), I am going to make use of Hagar as my little maid for the present. May Amy take her to the kitchen, Mrs. Travers, where she will do what she can to help those who are there?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the still rather anxious Mrs. Travers, leading the way. "Come, Hagar, Jane will make you comfortable, and you will soon learn our ways."

"Now you must all come in," said Amy,

skipping between her father and Mrs. Emmet, with a hand in each of theirs.

“I want to show Mrs. Emmet my dear old home. Aunt Kitty, lead the way, please. Oh! I must have a smell of those darling tea-roses; and look at those pansies, — aren’t they glorious, with their great big violet hats? And there are some clove pinks dressed up for company, — and oh! hear that dear little wren. See, Mrs. Emmet, hasn’t he a cunning little house up in the cherry-tree? Is it not *nice* to be home?”

Amy’s eyes sparkled, and she chattered like a little chipmunk. They all looked lovingly at her, thinking how well she looked, and listened as if to the sweetest music. And what music is sweeter than the happy, cheerful voice of a dear child?

Hand in hand she led her friend to the guest-chamber, throwing open the blinds to let in the golden afternoon sunshine, and greeting every familiar article of furniture as if it had been a living being.

“Look, Mrs. Emmet, you can see the lake from here, and Mount Beulah sloping down

to it," she said, as she stood at the window, "and the church with its 'God's Acre.' Mother taught me to call it that: her mother sleeps there, and so do my little brothers. And there is our apple-orchard. You should see it in May: it's as white as snow, and, oh, so sweet! And there in the meadow is Daisy, — oh, I do believe that's her new calf I have never seen! the dear, darling little thing! Now, while you are resting, I must run over, and make its acquaintance, and tell John where to put lammie, — poor little forgotten lammie. And, Mrs. Emmet, may I take Hagar with me if she's not too tired? for I think she *is* tired, and a little homesick."

Mrs. Emmet gave her consent, and turned to speak to aunt Kitty as Amy flew off like a little bird.

"Amy's perceptions are very quick and true. Hagar *is* homesick, strange as it may appear; but I think Amy will teach her that there is a better way of living than in the mere animal freedom and wildness of the savage. That is only what she regrets, for

she dreads a return to the cruelty that would certainly befall her if she lived again with the gypsies."

Then they had a long talk on this subject; and Mrs. Emmet told Miss Morgan how well Hagar had conducted herself after her return from the city, and how desirous she had been to do all that Amy advised.

"But are you sure that those people will allow her to remain with you, Mrs. Emmet?" asked aunt Kitty.

"I think they will," was the answer. "I shall take legal advice, of course, and do what I can to save Hagar from degradation and misery; but I look to Amy as my principal ally. Her warm heart and generous nature have already shown her capable of doing good service in this work. And when Belle comes" --

"Oh! is Belle coming?" interrupted aunt Kitty.

"I am afraid I am talking too fast, Miss Morgan: I have yet to consult Mr. and Mrs. Travers; but 'we shall see what we shall see.' And now I really am going to rest."



CHAPTER XXI.

THE GYPSIES AGAIN.

“**H**OW d’ye do, Vincent? How d’ye do, Belle and Clara and Tillie? I am so glad to see you all. And Miss Gaylord too. How tired you must be!”

It is Amy speaking, in that glad, happy-toned voice of hers, giving her hand to one and a kiss to the other, as she stands, in the clear light of the late summer, at the door of the Johnson Cottage which her father has hired, and made ready, with Mrs. Emmet’s help, for Mr. Vincent Travers’s family. And here the dusty, tired group look up with wonder at the banner floating over the porch. It is only a strip of white muslin with the word ‘Welcome’ in large, red letters upon it. Amy and Hagar cut these letters out, and

sewed them on, and then "flung their banner to the breeze," as Amy said, which meant that they tied it to the pillars of the portico, where it was prettily surrounded with hanging tendrils of a vine.

It is a trying moment to Belle. Well she remembers the cold salutation she gave Amy at Burton Beach. What a contrast all this is to that. But how entirely Amy seems to have forgotten it, as she turns from one to the other, and takes their bags and baskets, and hats and wraps, while the elders are talking all at once, and commenting upon the house and the place, and the view and the weather. "Oh, but I'm tired!" says Tillie; and little Clara says she is "*so* tired," and Vincent looks so tall and thin, and Belle—well, Belle limps a little, and Amy puts her arm around her as she says, —

"You are lame yet: let me help you. Come away up-stairs, where we can have a long talk, and I can thank you for those nice, long letters. *I* hate to write letters, but you do it beautifully: I do believe you'll be an author some day, and write books. Won't

that be fine? You can make a splendid story, you know, out of all you have been through." The idea of Amy thanking *her*! That is too much for Belle, who has learned a lesson of humility never to be forgotten. She puts her arm around Amy, and whispers something, — just a few broken words of sorrow for the past, and a wish to know Amy better; and then Amy kisses her, and says generously and earnestly, —

"Please don't say any more about *that*. You and I know each other now; we didn't before: and we are going to have such good times together. I have *so* much to tell you, and to show you; and oh! isn't Mrs. Emmet lovely? Did you ever meet anybody kinder or better? And now that you have come to live here for *good*, to stay always, you'll know us all; and you will like the country so much more than the city."

Belle listens with brightening eyes; and Vincent comes in, half shouting, —

"I say, Belle, there's a tennis court all marked out over in that field," pointing out the window; "and uncle says I can have his

boat on the lake whenever I want it ; and I am going to help cut the corn and the buck-wheat, and he's going to pay me just as if I were a man ; and that gypsy girl knows how to make hammocks, and she's going to teach me, so that I can do that too. Won't it be jolly ? I feel as rich as Cræsus already, — and a great deal happier," he added wisely.

Then Tillie and little Clara ran in asking for their dollies, saying there was a dear little woodshed where they could keep house ; and there was an apple-tree to climb, which was as safe as if it had stairs, and they could sit up in the boughs, and eat apples all day. After they had gone, came Miss Gaylord and Miss Morgan, aunt Clara and aunt Kitty talking about the housekeeping, and new receipts for puddings and soups, and consulting as to domestic resources ; aunt Clara pretending to be a great blunderer, and assuming that aunt Kitty knew every thing worth knowing.

Down-stairs Mrs. Emmet and Mr. and Mrs. Travers are also conferring. Mr. Vincent Travers's house in the city has been sold,

and business will keep him in the West for some months yet; but Clara Gaylord is to take charge of her nieces and nephew with new zeal and interest.

"One favor, however, I must ask," said Mrs. Emmet, "and that is, to have Amy and Isabella for a long visit in the winter.

"But how about lessons?" asks anxious Mrs. Travers.

"They shall not lose them: we will all study together, — French and German and Latin and literature, as much as you please, — and some other lessons which have to be learned, too, — consideration and pity for the poor, the miserable, the wicked. Our little girls have had an unusual experience in coming so near to the lives of those who know little else than misery; but perhaps it has made them the more desirous of doing their share, small though it be, in making heavy burdens lighter, and sad hearts happier."

The summer days grew shorter and shorter: the long, cool evenings, when meteors flashed as they fell across the sky, succeeded the brilliant amber sunsets of early autumn.

Daisies and clover made room for golden-rod and asters, and the spicy perfumes of ripe fruits filled the air. From their woodland rambles the children came home laden with rich spoils, — boughs of oak burnished with bronze, dogwood in warm coppery tints, sycamore and maples flaming in yellow and red, and poke-berries and feathery clematis. As they bore their treasures in, wreathed about them, they looked like wood-nymphs; and the clear red of their cheeks vied with the sun-tinted forest-leaves.

On the cottage hearth were hickory-sticks for the warm glow which the cool mornings and evenings rendered necessary; and many pleasant games went on when the long, rainy days set in, and the wild, sobbing storm stripped the bushes of their beauty.

Amy and Isabella had indeed learned to love each other. Isabella still was inclined to be proud and imperious; it was natural to her: but she was learning to control these faults, and Amy's greater gentleness and care for others were a constant reminder to her that forgetfulness of self has a truer dignity

than self-assertion. Besides all their merry games, it was a new pleasure to learn housewifely ways, and help her aunt Clara in keeping the cottage orderly and neat. It was her duty to dust the parlor, and polish the silver, and wipe the glasses; and she was even so ambitious as to wish to cook; and in all these things she could turn to Amy for advice, for Amy had long been allowed to help her aunt Kitty: and between aunt Clara and aunt Kitty, there was now a pretty rivalry as to who should make the best preserves, the clearest, firmest jellies, and the most appetizing pickles; for, though Clara Gaylord was but a beginner, she had stirred up aunt Kitty to novel experiments: and they had quite seriously discussed the publication of a new cook-book with an æsthetic title, exclusively for people of great taste.

Vincent was as merry as the day was long, going about the farm with his uncle, and learning the use of implements as well as the varieties of grain. Indeed, he had been heard to say something about "rotation of crops," which made Tillie giggle, and ask him what

he meant: but Clara hushed her, and said Vincent "had got to be big *some* time;" and then she had buried her head in the long, fleecy wool of the sheep which had been Amy's little lamb. Little lamb no longer! but a great, fat, woolly creature which would have to be sheared, and have its soft coat turned into little stockings for Clara.

It was a cold, clear, October day, and the green burrs of the chestnuts had dropped their glossy brown contents over all the fallen leaves. The children were merrily picking them up, their voices ringing out in silvery laughter as the frightened or disturbed crows cawed over their heads, and sailed away, flapping their black wings against the deep blue of the sky. A happy group they were, — Belle in a jaunty scarlet cap, and red kilted skirt with a tight, trim, black jersey; Amy in a Scotch plaid; and the little girls in blue hoods and coats: Vincent in a woodsman's stout suit completed the picture. They were going to make a fire to roast their nuts, and their aunts had promised to send them luncheon.

"Here it comes," said Vincent, blowing some embers that refused to burn, "and Hagar will show us how to make a better fire."

They all turned to greet Hagar, whose quick aptitude for out-door sports, as well as her desire to oblige, made her a great favorite; but they saw at once that something was the matter, as she put down the big basket of goodies and the pail of milk.

"What is it, Hagar? Tell us! tell us!" they cried, crowding around her as she stood there pale and trembling.

"I saw some of my people just now. They are coming this way. Oh, I am so afraid!" she said, wringing her hands, and looking imploringly at the sympathetic faces around her.

"You don't say so! Where are they?" were their quick ejaculations, followed by the instant determination to protect her.

The shouts of rude voices and the barking of dogs and the jingling of bells were now distinctly borne to them. The little girls, Tillie and Clara, began to whimper.

But Belle and Vincent and Amy saw that they must at once take measures to hide Hagar, and perhaps themselves; for they had no wish to attract the attention of these lazy vagabonds.

Pushing the girls in a heap together, Vincent quickly gathered boughs, and cut down saplings till he had an immense heap of brush-wood under which he made them crawl; then, with the agility of a young panther, he mounted the highest tree he could find, and waited the result of his action. He hardly dared to look down the road, and it seemed an age before the lumbering vans came slowly into view. What if the soft breeze which fanned his cheeks, hot with excitement and rapid movement, should disturb the big bundle of fagots below? Or what if the gypsies, espying it, should wish to replenish their stock of firewood? The thought made him shudder, and the perspiration start out.

He scarcely breathed, and yet, like a veritable panther, he felt ready to pounce down upon the first one who should dare to approach.

Nearer and nearer they came, — laughing, lolling, jeering, smoking, cracking their whips, and jesting as if life were one long holiday, not to be well spent either.

Dissolute, dirty, and idle they were ; and Vincent wondered more and more how any thing good could come from them, — even Hagar. .

Now they were facing him. He counted their horses : he could see the colors of their rags, watch the expression of their faces. For a moment he thought they were stopping, for a moment his heart seemed to beat in his ears ; and then slowly they defiled past, — wagons, horses, men, women, and children, — going down the road and out of sight.

For many minutes Vincent did not move ; then, creeping down, he carefully surveyed the woods, the road, the distant fields.

“They are all gone,” he whispered to the heap of brush-wood.

“Are you sure ?” came in muffled accents from within.

“Quite so,” he answered. And then, with a rush, out came the children.

"I should have smothered in one minute and a half more," said Belle.

"And I too," said Amy. While Tillie and Clara wiped the tears of fright from their eyes, and strove to put on braver looks.

But Hagar's relief made her so happy that she began a wild sort of dance, which made them all stare.

Then she spread the table-cloth, and started a fresh fire ; and they had the nicest picnic possible.

As they all sat around the crackling flames, and opened their nuts, they begged Hagar for the story of her life.





CHAPTER XXII.

HAGAR'S STORY.

THE children were in a half-circle around the fire, with Hagar in the middle of them ; and every face was turned towards the gipsy girl in eager expectation.

"Where shall I begin?" she asked bashfully. "I ain't used to talking much, and I can't say things as nice as you all do."

"Oh! no matter for that," said Belle ; and Amy patted her on the arm re-assuringly.

"It's the story we care for, not the fine talk," said Vincent.

"Yes," said Tillie, — and Clara nodded her head, — "please begin just as far back as when you were a mite of a baby."

"Of course she can't do that," said Amy smiling : "no one can."

"*I* can," said Clara triumphantly, — "almost," she added softly, seeing the amused expression on all their faces.

"And I can, 'almost,' too," said Hagar; "for I must have been very little when I used to go around the streets with a woman who played a hand-organ, and I had a tin cup for the pennies."

"What did your mother let you do that for?" asked Clara, with big eyes of surprise.

"It wasn't my mother: I hadn't any mother, — at least, I don't remember her. It wasn't so bad getting the pennies: it was only bad when nobody gave me any, then I was whacked and thumped."

"Oh!" went up in chorus from the children.

"Do you want me to go on?" said Hagar, who quickly noticed the shocked expression on her companions' faces.

"Of course we do," they all said.

"Then, you musn't mind about the hard knocks, for I was used to 'em; and that's all over now, you know," she said, turning to

Amy, who could not help contrasting Hagar's memories with her own happy recollections of kisses and sugar-plums, soft laps of coaxing grandmother and aunties.

"Yes, that is all over," said Amy, smiling through a few tear-drops.

"You see," said Hagar, "I wasn't quite as smart as the monkey; for he could climb up to windows, and make people laugh at his red cap, which he bowed with; and he could beat a drum, and do all sorts of funny things. But he got sick one day, and so they took me instead. I don't know how old I was. I was playing in the gutter, when they picked me up, and tied a shawl around me, and said, 'She'll do as well as Jocko;' and away I had to go. I was sorry, and cried for my playmates; and it made my feet ache to walk so much; and it tired me so to hear those same tunes over and over and over again: but I got used to it, and was sorry again when Maria said I was too big, and took her baby instead. Then I had to stay home, and cook onions, and wash rags, and learn how to make cigarettes, such as Maria's husband kept in

his stall where he sold oranges and dates. But I used to run off whenever I got the chance, for I hated to stay in the house: it was dark down in the cellar, and the things smelt so, it wasn't nice; and in going around with the hand-organ I had seen pleasant streets and pretty houses and nice children, and I liked to look at them again: but oh, how I was scolded when I went back, and whipped too!"

"Poor thing!" said Tillie.

"What made you go back to them," asked Belle.

"'Cause I didn't know where else to go."

"You might have asked *somebody*, I should think, to be kinder to you," said Amy.

"No," said Vincent, "poor children don't think of such things: they just take everything as it comes. Hagar didn't know who her father or mother was, and I dare say other people might have been worse to her."

"Yes," said Hagar; "but I did not say I did not know who my father was."

"What!" exclaimed the children, breathless with surprise at this unexpected announcement.

"I only said I did not remember my mother."

"We all thought you an orphan," said Belle, a little reproachfully.

"I may be," said Hagar sorrowfully; "for my father was a sailor, and I have never seen him since the time I left Maria."

"Then you did run away at last?"

"Not exactly," answered Hagar; "but I'll go on and tell you, so that you'll understand. I used to be a great deal in the street, and hear every thing and see every thing, and especially all the processions and things; and, whenever there was a circus in town, I couldn't keep away from the beautiful horses and other animals. I used to creep in the tents, and hide away, so as to see the curious creatures; and one day a woman said to me, 'How would you like to ride a horse yourself, missie?'

"'Oh!' said I, 'wouldn't I though!' and then she said if I'd go with her I should, and that's the way I got among the gypsies. The woman was ole marm; and she took me off with her to the country, and wouldn't let me

so much as say "Good-by" to Maria. I wanted to, and I used to cry and cry to think what had become of her; but I never saw her again."

"But she was so cross to you," said Amy.

"Yes, she was, but not so dreadful cross as ole marm: besides, she knew my father; for every time he came to see her he brought something nice, — it was the way they got Jocko; and when he came they were always kinder to me, and gave me more to eat."

"But why did your father leave you with such a rough set?" asked Vincent. "He ought to have put you in school."

"I don't know any reason," said Hagar, hanging her head. "I guess it was 'cause he was poor."

"Was he an American, or Englishman?"

"I don't know. He spoke Spanish, I think, to Maria."

"Was he kind to you? did he seem to love you?"

"He never whipped me: he gave me some earrings once, and called me his 'little par-

rot.' Ole marm took the earrings for herself."

"How mean!"

"Yes, it was; but she only pulled my ears, and said as I hadn't sore eyes I didn't need earrings."

"What did she mean by that?" asked Belle.

"I don't know."

"Oh! I know," said Amy. "Some people think it's good for the eyes to have holes bored in the ears."

"How ridiculous!" said Belle.

"Well," said Vincent, "if they think that, why don't they bore noses too? But what I want to know now, Hagar, is, where did all these things happen?"

"What things?"

Hagar had risen to put some fresh sticks on the fire, and was carefully guarding Clara's dress from sparks.

"Where did you go around with the hand-organ? Was it in a big city?"

"I think it was, but not New York. It was a place where there were ships, for I've

often run on the docks and wharves; but it had more country around it, for the circuses were out in the fields under tents; and I loved to get out of the dirty town, and see the green grass. That's what made me think it would be nice to go with ole marm, and ride horses; but I had enough of it, — not the grass or the horses, those I'll always like, but the living gypsy-fashion, without work or any clean, decent houses, and without learning any thing useful, or knowing who God is, and what he has done for us."

The children had grown very grave and still, and they now looked up at Hagar with a new interest, feeling that these words meant even more to her than they did to them, who had been taught all that was holy and reverential from their infancy. But again Vincent spoke: —

"Would you like to know any thing about your father, Hagar?"

The tears gathered in the girl's eyes.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I would like him to know all the kindness that has been shown to me; and I would like to do something

for him if I could. But I'm afraid there's no use in thinking about him."

"We'll see," said Vincent boldly; and then they all began gathering their things together to go home.





CHAPTER XXIII.

LITTLE PARROT.

IN the long winter that came so soon, treading with icy feet on the woodland paths where lately had frolicked the children, Vincent's one thought in moments of leisure was, what a pleasant ending of all Hagar's youthful troubles would be the finding of her father.

Amy and Isabella were with Mrs. Emmet in the city, going to the same school, and studying diligently. Tillie and Clara said their lessons to their aunt Clara, and Vincent was his uncle Tom's right-hand man. To be sure, he went to the minister in Beulah twice a week for Latin and mathematics, and Miss Morgan assisted him with his French: but whatever time he could spare he was with

his uncle ; for he had quite determined to be a farmer, and nothing pleased him more than to be allowed to hear his uncle Tom's discussions concerning stock and crops.

Mrs. Emmet had taken every legal measure necessary to protect Hagar, and it had been thought best to leave her for a while under Mrs. Travers's kind care in the country. She seemed to be entirely satisfied and happy, and became as great a favorite in the kitchen as she was with the children. Tillie and Clara were glad to have her share their lessons ; and, though she was so much older, she did not disdain to have them show her any mistakes she might make. This teachable disposition was what won her so many friends. But Vincent fancied that he often saw a sad look in her bright, dark eyes ; and he often spoke to her about her father, and imagined that it made her happier.

Full of this thought one day, he wrote to Amy and Isabella about it ; and they, in turn, talked it over with Mrs. Emmet, who always took much interest in their correspondence.

“Don’t you suppose, Mrs. Emmet, that, if we tried, we might find out something about Hagar’s father?” asked Amy.

“Hardly, my dear. It would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack.”

It was near holiday time, and they were also discussing what should be done; whether all should go to the country, or whether Miss Gaylord should bring Tillie and Clara to the city.

“Mother writes that she really cannot spare me at Christmas,” said Amy; “and she wishes Mrs. Emmet would come to us for a visit.”

Mrs. Emmet smiled, as she said, “It’s like the puzzle of the fox and the goose and the bag of grain. If you go home, Amy, Belle won’t want to stay; and, if Belle goes, Tillie and Clara won’t want to come. Now, how do you think it would do to divide?”

“But how, Mrs. Emmet? Who shall stay, and who shall go?”

“If you go to the country, Vincent might come in your place, then Belle would be satisfied; and after Vincent has been here, Tillie

and Clara could take their turn; and then, for New Year's Day, I would go on, and we would all be together."

Amy and Belle came to the conclusion that this would be a very good settlement; for they knew that Mrs. Emmet could not leave any sooner, owing to her own family arrangements and engagements. Thus it was that Vincent came to the city for a few days.

He had not been many hours at Mrs. Emmet's before his favorite theme of thought came uppermost. They had been talking of Hagar, and were saying how strange it must seem to know nothing of one's father and mother, and how many poor children were left thus desolate.

"But I can't help thinking we might find Hagar's father if we tried," said Vincent, looking up eagerly at Mrs. Emmet, whom he considered the embodiment of all earthly power.

"How would you try?" asked Mrs. Emmet.

"Oh! I'd go about here and there, asking everybody."

"That is somewhat indefinite," answered Mrs. Emmet, looking kindly upon Vincent's enthusiasm.

"Yes: but I have something to go upon, you know," said the boy.

"No, I did not know that," said his friend. "What is it?"

"Oh! I've made Hagar tell me her story over and over again, and I've come to the conclusion that Boston is the place she was lost in; and I think her father's first name is Josef, and perhaps his last name is Mendez."

"Why, what makes you think so?" said Mrs. Emmet, now quite interested. "She could not tell me any thing of the sort when I tried to find out more."

"No: neither could she tell me. But one evening we were all roasting apples and naming nuts, — I think it was Halloween, — and Tillie and Clara were teasing our cook about some one named Joseph, when suddenly Hagar said over and over again, as if something had just flashed into her head, 'Josef, Josef,' and then she added, 'Mendez.' She looked so queer, and seemed for a min-

ute as if she were frightened, that I didn't say any thing; but after a while I asked her what she meant; and she said she did not know, only the name seemed to come to her. She did not know how or why, but it seemed to belong to some one she knew. I wrote it down on purpose, and don't you think something may come of it?"

"Possibly," said Mrs. Emmet; "but I hope you held out no hopes to Hagar on so slight a foundation."

"Oh, no!" said Vincent eagerly. "I did not, for I was so afraid you might not approve."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Emmet; "that was thoughtful;" and then she changed the subject.

But nothing came of all this, though Vincent asked many people, and went to many places; and the holidays went by as if on the wings of the wind, and studies were resumed, and the winter drew to its close.

Lent began early; and this was always Mrs. Emmet's time for going about to the hospitals, — the ones she was not most closely

interested in. She had her nearer charities always to attend to. Many a sad story of human suffering did she hear, and many a poor creature blessed her for loving sympathy which sometimes even prolonged their lives. She did not recount all her experiences to her young friends, for she did not wish to sadden their bright youth. She had interested Belle and Amy in useful work for the poor, and they gave much of their leisure to it. Belle had done what she could for the poor, dumb woman whose unwilling guest she had been, and they often visited her laughing baby in the day-nursery where the mother had been induced to place it while she worked at some employment which paid her better than sewing. They got her, too, to go to a church for deaf mutes; and her husband, under this gentle influence, had greatly improved, and broken off all association with reckless or wicked companions. But one day, towards the close of Lent, Mrs. Emmet came home, and hurriedly called the children from their books into her morning-room.

"Sit down, Amy," she said, "and you too, Belle: I have something to tell you."

Amy curled herself on the rug, and Belle ensconced herself on the sofa, sure of something entertaining; for sometimes Mrs. Emmet could tell very funny stories: but it was nothing funny this time, for Mrs. Emmet looked very grave.

"I went, as you know, after lunch, to St. Mary's Hospital, and, having occasion to look over the books, came upon the list of recent admissions. As I was making a memorandum upon a letter in my pocket,—the first I have ever received from Hagar,—my eye lighted on the name 'Josef Mendez;' and instantly I remembered what Vincent had told us. I asked to see the man, and was taken to the ward where he lay. He was so thin and worn with long illness that there could have been no possibility of discovering any likeness between him and—any one else; and besides, the name is a common one: but, after asking about his condition, I said a few words in Spanish. In a little while he spoke to me

very freely ; said he knew he could not live, but that he had one heavy weight on his heart, which would make it hard for him to die. I asked him what it was ; but he shook his head, and gazed in a troubled way at me as if nothing could relieve him. Then very gently and carefully I told him about a little girl who was lost, and whom I knew ; and I wondered if he could assist me in finding her father, who was a Spanish sailor. At first, he just gazed and gazed, half stupefied ; then he listened, and partly rose upon his poor, thin arm, his eyes getting bigger and bigger. At last he asked, —

“ ‘ What is her name ? ’ ”

“ I hardly dared to whisper ‘ Hagar ; ’ but you should have seen the look of delight that flashed upon that poor, pale face.”

“ She is mine ! ” he cried. “ She is mine ! Bring her to me.”

“ Then I had to explain that she was far away ; that she was no longer the little, tiny child he thought her ; that she had grown, and had no recollection of him other than that he had called her ‘ Little Parrot.’ At

this he fairly laughed till the tears came, and begged me to send for her."

"And will you?" "Oh, please hurry, Mrs. Emmet!" "And must he die?" said first one and then the other of the children.

"I have telegraphed to Mr. Travers: Hagar will be here to-night."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Belle; but Amy could not speak for tears.

It was Easter Day; and, though the air was chill, the sun shone warmly. Far and near, bells and organs rang out happy chimes, proclaiming the risen Saviour.

In a corner of the long hospital-ward, where loving hands had sought to make the day bright with flowers, was a high screen, and behind this screen stood a group of children, — Amy, Isabella, Vincent, and Hagar. All bore lilies in their hands, — white, fragrant, pure, — emblems of our lives when washed from sin, and made fit for an offering to the Lord.

The children stepped softly towards the

bed where lay Hagar's father. He took them each by the hand, looked into their faces, and whispered thankful words. He was very quiet then for a moment, as if in silent prayer, or perhaps listening to the music which wafted in the open window from a neighboring church; and Mrs. Emmet motioned to Hagar to draw nearer. She had been with him a week, and heard all about his wandering, dangerous life, all about her young mother, whom Death had taken from her child when but a few days old; and now the end of their short friendship was approaching.

All the children watched with awe-struck faces the shadow which was so plainly gathering about the narrow cot, and yet they were not afraid. The peace, the rest, the purity of Easter, and its joyous hopes encompassed them.

Hagar knelt beside her father; and Mrs. Emmet read in clear, distinct tones the commendatory prayer. As she ceased, the dying man's eyes closed, his lips faintly uttered, —

“Good-by, little parrot,” and Hagar’s father ceased to breathe.

My story is ended. The young cousins in city and country have grown to be even stronger friends than ever. Summer and winter find them together in their pursuits and pastimes. Hagar has found a happy home with Mrs. Emmet, who is training her for a useful, industrious life ; and she is as grateful as a summer flower for refreshing rain.



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